Galaxy
SCIENCE FICTION

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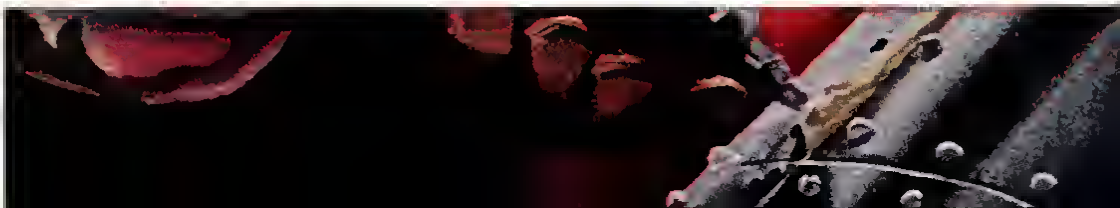

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WHAT'S BETTER THAN MONEY?

¶ Lots of things: Paid-up accident insurance for a hard-boiled pulp detective, for instance. . . . A stereoscopic full-color crystal ball for a swami. . . . A bathing suit with built-in curves for a flat-bottom non-dreamboat.

¶ But for science fiction readers, such appealing plums lack *ingenuity*. Not so with the startling list we've prepared. For merely explaining a mystery (which no one has yet been able to explain satisfactorily) you can win the most exciting, the most extraordinary . . .

¶ SCIENCE FICTION prizes ever offered in any contest!

¶ We don't say this is the greatest science fiction contest there ever was; we want you to say it. And very far from incidental—some reader, somewhere, may hove the actual answer to the key question:

What and Why Are Flying Saucers?

¶ Check the contents page for our Flying Saucer Contest rules and prizes.

¶ Remember, there is a $100 cash bonus for each of the winners of the first three prizes if their entries are accomponied by a subscription to GALAXY *Science Fiction*.

Galaxy
SCIENCE FICTION

GLEN HARRIS

November, 1950 Vol. 1, No. 2

Cover by Don Sibley illustrating Honeymoon in Hell

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Next Issue at Your Newsstand First Week in November

Printed in the U. S. A. Reg. U. S. Pat. Off.

It's All Yours

MOST new magazines, especially in the science fiction field, assure their readers that they are the readers' magazines and that suggestions are welcome and will be followed. The assurance, however, is hedged with unspoken reservations.

GALAXY *Science Fiction* offers that same assurance . . . but there are no reservations of any kind whatever. This *is*, literally and completely, your magazine. Your suggestions *will* be followed. Makeup, art, editorial content, everything from cover to cover, including the cover, and even the size of the magazine itself *you* will decide for us.

There is, in other words, nothing inflexible about GALAXY *Science Fiction*. Repeat, nothing. Not a single thing. A year from now, it may look entirely different, and every change will be the result of alert study of readers' wishes and willingness to put those wishes into concrete form.

Let's detail the statement and see just how inclusive it is:

● Digest size, cover design and tone of the cover painting were determined by a poll of readers, writers, artists, and disinterested non-fans. While extensive, the survey could not possibly be exhaustive. A more complete sampling via your letters can change size, design and selection of cover illustrations.

● Serials are book length, and all thus far ordered are scheduled for hard-cover publication . . . exactly as they appear here, except for minor editing differences. Do you favor full-length serials, 60,000 to 90,000 words each, or would you rather have the 30,000 to 45,000 word stories that are termed novels, and sometimes even book-length novels, in other magazines?

● We have arbitrarily decided upon a one-third installment of the serial, two novelets, three to five short stories, and one short article as desirable balance for the magazine. Would you rather have shorter serial installments, longer novelets, fewer short stories, expanded articles? Or do you have other ideas on editorial content and balance?

● Are you in favor of articles at all? If so, do you prefer general subjects, briefly and interestingly treated, or technical themes written at length and in non-layman's language?

● Does an editorial page, in your opinion, have a place in a magazine of science fiction? What subjects, assuming you approve, should it discuss?

● As stated in our first issue, no

genuine letter department can appear until the third issue, since it takes two months to print and distribute a monthly magazine. There is no way to alter our decision *not* to run congratulatory or ordered letters in the first two issues, but we *do* plan to have a department . . . unless our readers vote against it.

● Should our book-review department be longer, shorter, or not at all?

● How are we doing on inside illustrations?

● Final and perhaps biggest point is the subject matter of our stories. We have challenged writers to present themes that could not be sold elsewhere . . . themes that are too adult, too profound or revolutionary in concept for other magazines to risk publishing. Letters received thus far (too late to form a department) indicate approval of this policy. But you may have a different opinion, and in GALAXY, at least, you have more than a right to be heard—you have an actual, concrete vote.

THE above statement is our pledge to you. GALAXY *Science Fiction* will be whatever you want it to be. But it must have active and ungrudging support in order to fulfil that promise.

We have sought that support in ways that no other science fiction magazine has ever attempted. Our publicity campaign, just concluded, is the first in the history of the field, and covered radio, TV, newspapers and periodicals. It has brought us readers who never bought a magazine of this type before. We are inducing fine writers in other branches of literature to try their hand in science fiction, and some of their efforts will be published shortly. We have packaged GALAXY more beautifully and expensively than any science fiction magazine now on the newsstands; our costs, according to competitive bids, appear to be 25 per cent more than our nearest competitor.

But our greatest support must come from our readers, of course.

For example, there is enormous pressure on newsstands for display; it is almost impossible for a dealer to display every magazine he receives. Furthermore, there is a tendency not to display new titles unless there is a demand for them.

If our readers can cajole dealers into granting GALAXY visible display, our sales potential will be greatly increased, which, in turn, will make expansion and improvement that much easier.

New readers are necessary not only for us, but to enlarge the entire market, for the bigger the audience, the bigger and better we and other publishers can make our magazines. This means spreading the word to non-readers that science fiction is adult fiction.

It really is your magazine. You can make it the magazine you want it to be. That's a promise!

—H. L. GOLD

HONEYMOON IN HELL

BY FREDRIC BROWN

Illustrated by Don Sibley

One way to stop a battle is to give enemies something that they can really fight about!

CHAPTER I

Too Many Females

ON SEPTEMBER 16th in the year 1962, things were going along about the same as usual, only a little worse. The cold war that had been waxing and waning between the United States and the Eastern Alliance—Russia, China, and their lesser satellites—was warmer than it had ever been. War, hot war, seemed not only inevitable but extremely imminent.

The race for the Moon was an immediate cause. Each nation had landed a few men on it and each claimed it. Each had found that rockets sent from Earth were inadequate to permit establishment of a permanent base upon the Moon, and that only establishment of a permanent base, in force, would determine possession. And so each nation (for convenience we'll call the Eastern


HNICIAN

Alliance a nation, although it was not exactly that) was engaged in rushing construction of a space station to be placed in an orbit around Earth.

With such an intermediate step in space, reaching the Moon with large rockets would be practicable and construction of armed bases, heavily garrisoned, would be comparatively simple. Whoever got there first could not only *claim* possession, but could implement the claim. Military secrecy on both sides kept from the public just how near to completion each space base was, but it was generally—and correctly—believed that the issue would be determined within a year, two years at the outside.

Neither nation could *afford* to let the other control the Moon. That much had become obvious even to those who were trying desperately to maintain peace.

On September 17th, 1962, a statistician in the birth record department of New York City (his name was Wilbur Evans, but that doesn't matter) noticed that out of 813 births reported the previous day, 657 had been girls and only 156 boys.

He knew that, statistically, this was practically impossible. In a small city where there are only, say, ten births a day, it is quite possible—and not at all alarming—that on any one given day, 90% or even 100%, of the births may be of the same sex. But out of so large a figure as 813, so high a ratio as 657 to 156 *is* alarming.

Wilbur Evans went to his department chief and he, too, was interested and alarmed. Checks were made by telephone—first with nearby cities and, as the evidence mounted, with more and more distant ones.

BY THE end of that day, the puzzled investigators—and there was quite a large group interested by then—knew that in every city checked, the same thing had happened. The births, all over the Western Hemisphere and in Europe, for that day had averaged about the same—three boys for every thirteen girls.

Back-checking showed that the trend had started almost a week before, but with only a slight predominance of girls. For only a few days had the discrepancy been obvious. On the fifteenth, the ratio had been three boys to every five girls and on the sixteenth it had been four to fourteen.

The newspapers got the story, of course, and kicked it around. The television comics had fun with it, if their audiences didn't. But four days later, on September 21st, only one child out of every eighty-seven born in the country was male. That wasn't funny. People and governments started to worry; biologists and laboratories who had already started to investigate the phenomenon made it their number one project. The television comics quit joking about it after one crack on the subject by the

top comedian in the country drew 875,480 indignant letters and lost him his contract.

On September 29th, out of a normal number of births in the United States, only forty-one were boys. Investigation proved that every one of these was a late, or delayed, birth. It became obvious that no male child had been conceived during the latter part of December of the previous year, 1961. By this time, of course, it was known that the same condition prevailed everywhere—in the countries of the Eastern Alliance as well as in the United States, and in every other country and area of the world—among the Eskimos, the Ubangi and the Indians of Tierra del Fuego.

The strange phenomenon, whatever it was, affected human beings only, however. Births among animals, wild or domesticated, showed the usual ratio of the two sexes.

Work on both space stations continued, but talk of war—and incidents tending to lead to war—diminished. The human race had something new, something less immediate, but in the long run far worse to worry about. Despite the apparent inevitability of war, few people thought that it would completely end the human race; a complete lack of male children definitely would. Very, very definitely.

And for once something was happening that the United States could not blame on the Eastern Alliance, and vice versa. The Orient—China and India in particular—suffered more, perhaps, than the Occident, for in those countries male offspring are of supreme emotional importance to parents. There were riots in both China and India, very bloody ones, until the people realized that they didn't know whom or what they were rioting against and sank back into miserable passivity

IN THE more advanced countries, laboratories went on twenty-four-hour shifts, and anyone who knew a gene from a chromosome could command his weight in paper currency for looking—however futilely—through a microscope. Accredited biologists and geneticists became more important than presidents and dictators. But they accomplished no more than the cults which sprang up everywhere (though mostly in California) and which blamed what was happening on everything from a conspiracy of the Elders of Zion to (with unusually good sense) an invasion from space, and advocated everything from vegetarianism to (again with unusually good sense) a revival of phallic worship.

Despite scientists and cults, despite riots and resignation, not a single male child was born anywhere in the world during the month of December, 1962. There had been isolated instances, all quite late births, during October and November.

January of 1963 again drew a blank. Not that everyone qualified wasn't trying.

Except, perhaps, the one person who was slated to do more than anyone else—well, almost anyone else—about the matter.

Not that Capt. Raymond F. Carmody, U.S.S.F., retired, was a misogamist, exactly. He liked women well enough, both in the abstract and in the concrete. But he'd been badly jilted once and it had cured him of any desire whatsoever for marriage. Marriage aside, he took women as he found them—and he had no trouble finding them.

For one thing, don't let the word "retired" fool you. In the Space Service, rocket pilots are retired at the ripe old age of twenty-five. The recklessness, reaction-speed and stamina of youth are much more important than experience. The trick in riding a rocket is not to *do* anything in particular; it's to be tough enough to stay alive and sane until you get there. Technicians do the brain-work and the only controls are braking rockets to help you get down in one piece when you land; reaction-speed is of more importance than experience in managing them. Neither speed nor experience helps you if you've gone batty en route from spending days on end in the equivalent of a coffin, or if you haven't what it takes not to die in a good landing. And a good landing is one that you can walk away from after you've recovered consciousness.

That's why Ray Carmody, at twenty-seven, was a retired rocket pilot. Aside from test flights on and near Earth, he'd made one successful flight to the Moon with landing and return. It had been the fifteenth attempt and the third success. There had been two more successful flights thereafter—altogether five successful round trips out of eighteen tries.

But each rocket thus far designed had been able, barely, to carry fuel to get itself and its crew of one back to Earth, with almost-starvation rations for the period required. Step-rockets were needed to do even that, and step-rockets are terrifically expensive and cumbersome things.

AT THE time Carmody had retired from the Space Service, two years before, it had been conceded that establishment of a permanent base of any sort on the Moon was completely impracticable until a space station, orbited around the Earth, had been completed as a way-station. Comparatively huge rockets could reach a space station with relative ease, and starting *from* a station in open space and against lesser gravitational pull from Earth, going the rest of the way to the Moon would be even simpler.

But we're getting away from Ray Carmody, as Carmody had got away from the Space Service. He could have had a desk job in it after old age had retired him, a job that would have paid better than he was making at the moment. But he knew little about the technical end of rocketry, and he knew less, and cared nothing, about administrative detail

work. He was most interested in cybernetics, which is the science of electronic calculating machines. The big machines had always fascinated him, and he'd found a job working with the biggest of them all, the one in the building on a corner of the grounds of the Pentagon that had been built, in 1958, especially to house it.

It was, of course, known as Junior to its intimates.

Carmody's job, specifically, was Operative, Grade I, and the Grade I meant that—despite his fame as one of the few men who had been to the Moon and lived to tell about it, and despite his ultra-honorable discharge with the grade of captain—his life had been checked back to its very beginning to be sure that he had not, even in his cradle, uttered a careless or subversive word.

There were only three other Grade I Operatives qualified to ask Junior questions and transmit his answers on questions which involved security—and that included questions on logistics, atomics, ballistics and rocketry, military plans of all sorts and everything else the military forces consider secret, which is practically everything except the currently preferred color of an infantryman's uniform.

The Eastern Alliance would undoubtedly have traded three puppet dictators and the tomb of Lenin to have had an agent, or even a sympathizer, as a Grade I Operative on Junior. But even the Grade II Operatives, who handled only problems dealing with non-classified matters, were checked for loyalty with extreme care. Possibly lest they might ask Junior a subversive question or feed a subversive idea into his electronic equivalent of a brain.

But be that as it may, on the afternoon of February 2, 1963, Ray Carmody was the Operative on duty in the control room. The only Operative, of course; dozens of technicians were required from time to time to service Junior and feed him, but only one Operative at a time fed data into him or asked him questions. So Carmody was alone in the soundproofed control room.

DOING nothing, however, at the moment. He'd just fed into Junior a complicated mess of data on molecular structure in the chromosome mechanism and had asked Junior—for the ten-thousandth time, at least—the sixty-four dollar question bearing on the survival of the human race: Why all children were now females and what could be done about it.

It had been quite a chunk of data, this time, and no doubt Junior would take quite a few minutes to digest it, add it to everything else he'd ever been told and synthesize the whole. No doubt in a few minutes he'd say, "Data insufficient." At least to this moment that had been his only answer to the sixty-four dollar question.

Carmody sat back and watched

Junior's complicated bank of dials, switches and lights with a bored eye. And because the intake-mike was shut off and Junior couldn't hear what he was saying anyway, and because the control room was soundproofed so no one else could hear him, either, he spoke freely.

"Junior," he said, "I'm afraid you're a washout on this particular deal. We've fed you everything that every geneticist, every chemist, every biologist in this half of the world knows, and all you do is come up with that 'data insufficient' stuff. What do you want—blood?

"Oh, you're pretty good on some things. You're a whiz on orbits and rocket fuels, but you just can't understand *women,* can you? Well, I can't either; I'll give you that. And I've got to admit you've done the human race a good turn on one deal—atomics. You convinced us that if we completed and used H-bombs, *both* sides would lose the coming war. I mean *lose.* And we've got inside information that the other side got the same answer out of your brothers, the cybernetics machines over there, so they won't build or use them, either. Winning a war with H-bombs is about like winning a wrestling match with hand grenades; it's just as unhealthful for you as for your opponent. But we weren't talking about hand grenades. We were talking about women. Or I was. Listen, Junior—"

A light, not on Junior's panel but in the ceiling, flashed on and off, the signal for an incoming intercommunicator call. It would be from the Chief Operative, of course; no one else could connect—by intercommunicator or any other method—with this control room.

Carmody threw a switch.

"Busy, Carmody?"

"Not at the moment, Chief. Just fed Junior that stuff on molecular structure of genes and chromosomes. Waiting for him to tell me it's not enough data, but it'll take him a few minutes yet."

"Okay. You're off duty in fifteen minutes. Will you come to my office as soon as you're relieved? The President wants to talk to you."

Carmody said, "Goody. I'll put on my best pinafore."

He threw the switch again. Quickly, because a green light was flashing on Junior's panel.

He reconnected the intake- and output-mikes and said, "Well, Junior?"

"Data insufficient," said Junior's level mechanical voice.

Carmody sighed and noted the machine's answer on the report ending in a question which he had fed into the mike. He said, "Junior, I'm ashamed of you. All right, let's see if there's anything else I can ask and get an answer to in fifteen minutes."

HE PICKED up a pile of several files from the table in front of him and leafed through them quickly. None contained fewer than three pages of data.

"Nope," he said, "not a thing here I can give you in fifteen minutes, and Bob will be here to relieve me then."

He sat back and relaxed. He wasn't ducking work; experience had proven that, although an AE7 cybernetics machine could accept verbal data in conformance with whatever vocabulary it had been given, and translate that data into mathematical symbols (as it translated the mathematical symbols of its answer back into words and mechanically spoke the words), it could not adapt itself to a change of voice within a given operation. It could, and did, adjust itself to understanding, as it were, Carmody's voice or the voice of Bob Dana who would shortly relieve him. But if Carmody started on a given problem, he'd have to finish it himself, or Bob would have to clear the board and start all over again. So there was no use starting something he wouldn't have time to finish.

He glanced through some of the reports and questions to kill time. The one dealing with the space station interested him most, but he found it too technical to understand.

"But you won't," he told Junior. "Pal, I've got to give that to you; when it comes to anything except women, you're really *good.*"

The switch was open, but since no question had been asked, of course Junior didn't answer.

Carmody put down the files and glowered at Junior. "Junior," he said, "that's your weakness all right, women. And you can't have genetics without women, can you?"

"No," Junior said.

"Well, you do know that much. But even I know it. Look, here's one that'll stump you. That blonde I met at the party last night. What about her?"

"The question," said Junior, "is inadequately worded; please clarify."

Carmody grinned. "You want me to get graphic, but I'll fool you. I'll just ask you this—should I see her again?"

"No," said Junior, mechanically but implacably.

CARMODY'S eyebrows went up. "The devil you say. And may I ask why, since you haven't met the lady, you say that?"

"Yes. You may ask why."

That was one trouble with Junior; he always answered the question you actually asked, not the one you implied.

"Why?" Carmody demanded, genuinely curious now as to what answer he was going to receive. "Specifically, why should I not again see the blonde I met last night?"

"Tonight," said Junior, "you will be busy. Before tomorrow night you will be married."

Carmody almost literally jumped out of his chair. The cybernetics machine had gone stark raving crazy. It *must* have. There was no more chance of his getting married tomorrow than there was of a kangaroo

giving birth to a portable typewriter. And besides and beyond that, Junior never made predictions of the future —except, of course, on such things as orbits and statistical extrapolation of trends.

Carmody was still staring at Junior's impassive panel with utter disbelief and considerable consternation when the red light that was the equivalent of a doorbell flashed in the ceiling. His shift was up and Bob Dana had come to relieve him. There wasn't time to ask any further questions and, anyway, "Are you crazy?" was the only one he could think of at the moment.

Carmody didn't ask it. He didn't want to know.

CHAPTER II

Mission to Luna

CARMODY switched off both mikes and stood gazing at Junior's impassive panel for a long time. He shook his head, went to the door and opened it.

Bob Dana breezed in and then stopped to look at Carmody. He said, "Something the matter, Ray? You look like you'd just seen a ghost, if I may coin a cliché."

Carmody shook his head. He wanted to think before he talked to anybody—and if he did decide to talk, it should be to Chief Operative Reeber and not to anyone else. He said, "Just I'm a little beat, Bob."

"Nothing special up?"

"Nope. Unless maybe I'm going to be fired. Reeber wants to see me on my way out." He grinned. "Says the President wants to talk to me."

Bob chuckled appreciatively. "If he's in a kidding mood, then your job's safe for one more day. Good luck."

The soundproof door closed and locked behind Carmody, and he nodded to the two armed guards who were posted on duty outside it. He tried to think things out carefully as he walked down the long stretch of corridor to the Chief Operative's office.

Had something gone wrong with Junior? If so, it was his duty to report the matter. But if he did, he'd get himself in trouble, too. An Operative wasn't supposed to ask private questions of the big cybernetics machine—even big, important questions. The fact that it had been a joking question would make it worse.

But Junior had either given him a joking answer—and it couldn't be that, because Junior didn't have a sense of humor—or else Junior had made a flat, unadulterated error. Two of them, in fact. Junior had said that Carmody would be busy tonight and—well, a wheel *could* come off his idea of spending a quiet evening reading. But the idea of his getting married tomorrow was utterly preposterous. There wasn't a woman on Earth he had the slightest intention of marrying. Oh, someday, maybe, when he'd had a little more

fun out of life and felt a little more ready to settle down, he might feel differently. But it wouldn't be for years. Certainly not tomorrow, not even on a bet.

Junior *had* to be wrong, and if he was wrong it was a matter of importance, a matter far more important than Carmody's job.

So be honest and report? He made his decision just before he reached the door of Reeber's office. A reasonable compromise. He didn't *know* yet that Junior was wrong. Not to a point of mathematical certainty—just a billion to one odds against. So he'd wait until even that possibility was eliminated, until it was proven beyond all possible doubt that Junior was wrong. Then he'd report what he'd done and take the rap, if there was a rap. Maybe he'd just be fined and warned.

He opened the door and stepped in. Chief Operative Reeber stood up and, on the other side of the desk, a tall gray-haired man stood also. Reeber said, "Ray, I'd like you to meet the President of the United States. He came here to talk to you. Mr. President, Captain Ray Carmody."

And it *was* the President. Carmody gulped and tried to avoid looking as though he was doing a double take, which he was. Then President Saunderson smiled quietly and held out his hand. "Very glad to know you, Captain," he said, and Carmody was able to make the considerable understatement that he felt honored to meet the President.

Reeber told him to pull up a chair and he did so. The President looked at him gravely. "Captain Carmody, you have been chosen to—have the opportunity to volunteer for a mission of extreme importance. There is danger involved, but it is less than the danger of your trip to the Moon. You made the third—wasn't it?—out of the five successful trips made by United States pilots?"

Carmody nodded.

"This time the risk you will take is considerably less. There has been much technological advance in rocketry since you left the service two years ago. The odds against a successful round trip—even without the help of the space station, and I fear its completion is still two years distant—are much less. In fact, you will have odds of ten to one in your favor, as against approximately even odds at the time of your previous trip."

CARMODY sat up straighter. "My *previous* trip! Then this volunteer mission is another flight to the Moon? Certainly, Mr. President, I'll gladly—"

President Saunderson held up a hand. "Wait, you haven't heard all of it. The flight to the Moon and return is the only part that involves physical danger, but it is the least important part. Captain, this mission is, possibly, of more importance to humanity than the first flight to the Moon, even than the first flight to the stars—if and when we ever

make it—will be. What's at stake is the survival of the human race so that someday it *can* reach the stars. Your flight to the Moon will be an attempt to solve the problem which otherwise—"

HE PAUSED and wiped his forehead with a handkerchief.

"Perhaps you'd better explain, Mr. Reeber. You're more familiar with the exact way the problem was put to your machine, and its exact answers."

Reeber said, "Carmody, you know what the problem is. You know how much data has been fed into Junior on it. You know some of the questions we've asked him, and that we've been able to eliminate certain things. Such as—well, it's caused by no virus, no bacteria, nothing like that. It's not anything like an epidemic, because it struck the whole Earth at once, simultaneously. Even native inhabitants of islands that had no contact with civilization.

"We know also that whatever happens—whatever molecular change occurs—happens in the zygote after impregnation, very shortly after. We asked Junior whether an invisible *ray* of some sort could cause this. His answer was that it was possible. And in answer to a further question, he answered that this ray or force is possibly being used by—enemies of mankind."

"Insects? Animals? Martians?"

Reeber waved a hand impatiently. "Martians, maybe, if there *are* any Martians. We don't know that yet. But extra-terrestrials, most likely. Now Junior couldn't give us answers on this because, of course, we haven't the relevant data. It would be guesswork for him as well as for us—and Junior, being mechanical, can't guess. But here's a possibility:

"Suppose some extra-terrestrials *have* landed somewhere on Earth and have set up a station that broadcasts a ray that is causing the phenomenon of all children being girl-children. The ray is undetectable; at least thus far we haven't been able to detect it. They'd be killing off the human race and getting themselves a nice new planet to live on, without having to fire a shot, without taking any risk or losses themselves. True, they'll have to wait a while for us to die off, but maybe that doesn't mean anything to them. Maybe they've got all the time there is, and aren't in the slightest hurry."

Carmody nodded slowly. "It sounds fantastic, but I guess it's possible. I guess a fantastic situation like this *has* to have a fantastic explanation. But what do we do about it? How do we even prove it?"

Reeber said, "We fed the possibility into Junior as a working assumption—not as a fact—and asked him how we could check it. He came up with the suggestion that a married couple spend a honeymoon on the Moon—and see if circumstances are any different there."

"And you want me to pilot them there?"

"Not exactly, Ray. A little more than that—"

CARMODY forgot that the President was there. He said, "Good God, you mean you want me to—Then Junior *wasn't* crazy, after all!"

Shamefacedly, then, he had to explain about the extracurricular question he'd casually asked Junior and the answer he'd got to it.

Reeber laughed. "Guess we'll overlook your violation of Rule 17 this time, Ray. That is, if you accept the mission. Now here's the—"

"Wait," Carmody said. "I still want to know something. How did Junior know I was going to be picked out? And for that matter, why am I?"

"Junior was asked for the qualifications he'd recommend for the—ah—bridegroom. He recommended a rocket pilot who had already made the trip successfully, even though he was a year or two over the technical retirement age of twenty-five. He recommended that loyalty be considered as an important factor, and that the holding of a governmental position of great trust would answer that. He further recommended that the man be single."

"*Why* single? Look, there are four other pilots who've made that trip, and they're all loyal, regardless of what job they're holding now. I know them all personally. And all of them are married except me. Why not send a man who's already got a ball and chain?"

"For the simple reason, Ray, that the woman to be sent must be chosen with even more care. You know how tough a Moon landing is; only one woman in a hundred would live through it and still be able to—I mean, there's almost a negligible chance that the wife of any one of the other four pilots would be the best qualified woman who could possibly be found."

"Hmmm. Well, I suppose Junior's got something there. Anyway, I see now how he knew *I'd* be chosen. Those qualifications fit me exactly. But listen, do I have to *stay* married to whatever female is Amazonian enough to make the trip? There's a limit somewhere, isn't there?"

"Of course. You will be legally married before your departure, but upon your return a divorce will be granted without question if both—or either one—of you wish. The offspring of the union, if any, will be cared for. Whether male or female."

"Hey, that's right," Carmody said. "There's only an even chance of hitting the jackpot in any case."

"Other couples will be sent. The first trip is the most difficult and most important one. After that, a base will be established. Sooner or later we'll get our answer. We'll have it if even one male child is conceived on the Moon. Not that that will help us find the station that's sending the rays, or to detect or identify the rays, but we'll know what's wrong and can narrow our inquiry. I take it that you accept?"

Carmody sighed. "I guess so. But it seems a long way to go for— Say, who's the lucky girl?"

REEBER cleared his throat. "I think you'd better explain this part to him, Mr. President."

President Saunderson smiled as Carmody looked toward him. He said, "There is a more important reason, which Mr. Reeber skipped, why we could not choose a man who was already married, Captain. This is being done on an international basis, for very important diplomatic reasons. The experiment is for the benefit of humanity, not any nation or ideology. Your wife will be a Russian."

"A *Commie?* You're kidding me, Mr. President."

"I am not. Her name is Anna Borisovna. I have not met her, but I am informed that she is a very attractive girl. Her qualifications are quite similar to yours, except, of course, that she has not been to the Moon. No woman has. But she has been a pilot of experimental rockets on short-range flights. And she is a cybernetics technician working on the big machine at Moscow. She is twenty-four. And not, incidentally, an Amazon. As you know, rocket pilots aren't chosen for bulk. There is an added advantage in her being chosen. She speaks English."

"You mean I've got to talk to her, too?"

Carmody caught the look Reeber flashed at him and he winced.

The President continued: "You will be married to her tomorrow by a beam-televised ceremony. You blast off, both of you, tomorrow night—at different times, of course, since one of you will leave from here, the other from Russia. You will meet on the Moon."

"It's a large place, Mr. President."

"That is taken care of. Major Granham—you know him, I believe?" Carmody nodded. "He will supervise your takeoff and the sending of the supply rockets. You will fly tonight—a plane has been prepared for you—from the airport here to Suffolk Rocket Field. Major Granham will brief you and give you full instructions. Can you be at the airport by seven-thirty?"

Carmody thought and then nodded. It was five-thirty now and there'd be a lot of things for him to do and arrange in two hours, but he could make it if he tried. And hadn't Junior told him he was going to be busy this evening?

"Only one thing more," President Saunderson said. "This is strictly confidential, until and unless the mission is successful. We don't want to raise hopes, either here or in the Eastern Alliance, and then have them smashed." He smiled. "And if you and your wife have any quarrels on the Moon, we don't want them to lead to international repercussions. So please—try to get along." He held out his hand. "That's all, except thanks."

Carmody made the airport in time

and the plane was waiting for him, complete with pilot. He had figured that he would have to fly it himself, but he realized that it was better this way; he could get a bit of rest before they reached Suffolk Field.

He got a little, but not much. The plane was a hot ship that got him there in less than an hour. A liaison officer was waiting for him and took him immediately to Major Granham's office.

GRANHAM got down to brass tacks almost before Carmody could seat himself in the offered chair.

He said, "Here's the picture. Since you got out of the service, we've tremendously increased the accuracy of our rockets, manned or otherwise. They're so accurate that, with proper care, we can hit within a mile of any spot on the Moon that we aim at. We're picking Hell Crater—it's a small one, but we'll put you right in the middle of it. You won't have to worry about steering; you'll hit within a mile of the center without having to use your braking rockets for anything except braking."

"Hell Crater?" Carmody said. "There isn't any."

"Our Moon maps have forty-two thousand named craters. Do you know them all? This one, incidentally, was named after a Father Maximilian Hell, S. J., who was once director of the Vienna Observatory in old Austria."

Carmody grinned. "Now you're spoiling it. How come it was picked as a honeymoon spot, though? Just because of the name?"

"No. One of the three successful flights the Russians made happened to land and take off there. They found the footing better than anywhere else either of us has landed. Almost no dust; you won't have to slog through knee-deep pumice when you're gathering the supply rockets. Probably a more recently formed crater than any of the others we've happened to land in or explore."

"Fair enough. About the rocket I go in—what's the payload besides myself?"

"Not a thing but the food, water and oxygen you'll need en route, and your spacesuit. Not even fuel for your return, although you'll return in the same rocket you go in. Everything else, including return fuel, will be there waiting for you; it's on the way now. We fired ten supply rockets last night. Since you take off tomorrow night, they'll get there forty-eight hours before you do. So—"

"WAIT a minute," Carmody said. "On my first trip I carried fifty pounds payload besides my return fuel. Is this a smaller type of rocket?"

"Yes, and a much better one. Not a step-rocket like you used before. Better fuel and more of it; you can accelerate longer and at fewer gravities, and you'll get there quicker. Forty-four hours as against almost

four days before. Last time you took four and half Gs for seven minutes. This time you'll get by with three Gs and have twelve minutes' acceleration before you reach *Brennschluss*—cut loose from Earth's gravitation. Your first trip, you *had* to carry return fuel and a little payload because we didn't have the accuracy to shoot a supply rocket after you—or before you—and be sure it'd land within twenty miles. All clear? After we're through talking here I'll take you to the supply depot, show you the type of supply rocket we're using and how to open and unload it. I'll give you an inventory of the contents of each of the twelve of them we sent."

"And what if all of them don't get there?"

"At least eleven of them will. And everything's duplicated; if any one rocket goes astray, you'll still have everything you need—for two people. And the Russians are firing an equal number of supply rockets, so you'll have a double factor of safety." He grinned. "If none of our rockets get there, you'll have to eat borsht and drink vodka, maybe, but you won't starve."

"Are you kidding about the vodka?"

"Maybe not. We're including a case of Scotch, transferred to lightweight containers, of course. We figure it might be just the icebreaker you'll need for a happy honeymoon."

Carmody grunted.

"So maybe," Granham said, "the Russians'll figure the same way and send along some vodka. And the rocket fuels for your return, by the way, are not identical, but they're interchangeable. Each side is sending enough for the return of two rockets. If our fuel doesn't get there, you divvy with her, and vice versa."

"Fair enough. What else?"

"Your arrival will be just after dawn—Lunar time. There'll be a few hours when the temperature is somewhere between horribly cold and broiling hot. You'd better take advantage of them to get the bulk of your work done. Gathering supplies from the rockets and putting up the prefab shelter that's in them, in sections. We've got a duplicate of it in the supply depot and I want you to practice assembling it."

"Good idea. It's airtight and heatproof?"

"Airtight once you paint the seams with a special preparation that's included. And, yes, the insulation is excellent. Has a very ingenious little airlock on it, too. You won't have to waste oxygen getting in and out."

CARMODY nodded. "Length of stay?" he asked.

"Twelve days. Earth days, of course. That'll give you plenty of time to get off before the Lunar night."

Granham chuckled. "Want instructions to cover those twelve days? No? Well, come on around to the depot then. I'll introduce you to your ship and show you the supply rockets and the shelter."

CHAPTER III

Remotely Married

IT TURNED out to be a busy evening, all right. Carmody didn't get to bed until nearly morning, his head so swimming with facts and figures that he'd forgotten it was his wedding day. Granham let him sleep until nine, then sent an orderly to wake him and to state that the ceremony had been set for ten o'clock and that he'd better hurry.

Carmody couldn't remember what "the ceremony" was for a moment, then he shuddered and hurried.

A Justice of the Peace was waiting for him there and technicians were working on a screen and projector. Granham said, "The Russians agreed that the ceremony could be performed at this end, provided we made it a civil ceremony. That's all right by you, isn't it?"

"It's lovely," Carmody told him. "Let's get on with it. Or don't we have to? As far as I'm concerned—"

"You know what the reaction of a lot of people would be when they learn about it, if it wasn't legal," Granham said. "So quit crabbing. Stand right there."

Carmody stood right there. A fuzzy picture on the beam-television screen was becoming clearer. And prettier. President Saunderson had not exaggerated when he'd said that Anna Borisovna was attractive and that she was definitely not an Amazon. She was small, dark, slender and very definitely attractive and not an Amazon.

Carmody felt glad that nobody had corned it up by putting her in a wedding costume. She wore the neat uniform of a technician, and she filled it admirably and curved it at the right places. Her eyes were big and dark and they were serious until she smiled at him. Only then did he realize that the connection was two-way and that she was seeing him.

Granham was standing beside him. He said, "Miss Borisovna, Captain Carmody."

Carmody said, inanely, "Pleased to meet you," and then redeemed it with a grin.

"Thank you, Captain." Her voice was musical and only faintly accented. "It is a pleasure."

Carmody began to think it would be, if they could just keep from arguing politics.

The Justice of the Peace stepped forward into range of the projector. "Are we ready?" he asked.

"A second," Carmody said. "It seems to me we've skipped a customary preliminary. Miss Borisovna, will you marry me?"

"Yes. And you may call me Anna."

She even has a sense of humor, Carmody thought, astonished. Somehow, he hadn't thought it possible for a Commie to have a sense of humor. He'd pictured them as all being dead serious about their ridiculous ideology and about everything else.

He smiled at her and said, "All right, Anna. And you may call me Ray. Are you ready?"

WHEN she nodded, he stepped to one side to allow the Justice of the Peace to share the screen with him. The ceremony was brief and businesslike.

He couldn't, of course, kiss the bride or even shake hands with her. But just before they shut off the projector, he managed to grin at her and say, "See you in Hell, Anna."

And he'd begun to feel certain that it wouldn't be that at all, really.

He had a busy afternoon going over every detail of operation of the new type rocket, until he knew it inside and out better than he did himself. He even found himself being briefed on details of the Russian rockets, both manned and supply types, and he was surprised (and inwardly a bit horrified) to discover to what extent the United States and Russia had been exchanging information and secrets. It couldn't all have happened in a day or so.

"How long has this been going on?" he demanded of Granham.

"I learned of the projected trip a month ago."

"Why did they tell *me* only yesterday? Or wasn't I first choice, after all? Did somebody else back out at the last minute?"

"You've been chosen all along. You were the the only one who fitted *all* of the requirements that cybernetics machine dished out. But don't you remember how it was on your last trip? You weren't notified you were taking off until about thirty hours before. That's what's figured to be the optimum time—long enough to get mentally prepared and not so long you've got time to get worried."

"But this was a volunteer deal. What if I'd turned it down?"

"The cybernetics machine predicted that you wouldn't."

Carmody swore at Junior.

Granham said, "Besides, we could have had a hundred volunteers. Rocket cadets who've got everything you have except one round trip to the Moon already under their belts. We could have shown a picture of Anna around and had them fighting for the chance. That gal is Moon bait."

"Careful," Carmody said, "you are speaking of my wife." He was kidding, of course, but it was funny—he really hadn't liked Granham's wisecrack.

ZERO hour was ten p.m., and at zero minus fifteen minutes he was already strapped into the webbing, waiting. There wasn't anything for him to do except stay alive. The rockets would be fired by a chronometer set for the exact fraction of a second.

Despite its small payload, the rocket was a little roomier inside than the first one he'd gone to the Moon in, the R-24. The R-24 had been as roomy as a tight coffin. This

one, the R-46, was four feet in diameter inside. He'd be able to get at least a bit of arm and leg exercise on the way and not—as the first time—arrived so cramped that it had taken him over an hour to be able to move freely.

And this time he wouldn't have the horrible discomfort of having to wear his spacesuit, except for the helmet, en route. There's room in a four-foot cylinder to put a spacesuit on, and his was in a compartment—along with the food, water and oxygen—at the front (or top) of the rocket. It would be an hour's work to struggle into it, but he wouldn't have to do it until he was several hours away from the Moon.

Yes, this was going to be a breeze compared to the last trip. Comparative freedom of movement, forty-four hours as against ninety, only three gravities as against four and a half.

Then sound that was beyond sound struck him, sound so loud that he heard it with all of his body rather than only with his carefully plugged ears. It built up, seeming to get louder every second, and his weight built up too. He weighed twice his normal weight, then more. He felt the sickening curve as the automatic tilting mechanism turned the rocket, which had at first gone straight up, forty-five degrees. He weighed four hundred and eighty pounds and the soft webbing seemed to be hard as steel and to cut into him. Padding was compressed till it felt like stone. Sound and pressure went on and on interminably. Surely it had been hours instead of minutes.

Then, at the moment of *Brennschluss,* free of the pull of Earth—sudden silence, complete weightlessness. He blacked out.

But only minutes had gone by when he returned to consciousness. For a while he fought nausea and, only when he was sure he had succeeded did he unbuckle himself from the webbing that had held him through the period of acceleration. Now he was coasting, weightless, at a speed that would carry him safely toward the gravitational pull of the Moon. No further firing of fuel would be necessary until he used his jets to brake his landing.

All he had to do now was hang on, to keep from going crazy from claustrophobia during the forty hours before he'd have to start getting ready for the landing.

It was a dull time, but it passed.

Into spacesuit, back into the webbing, but this time with his hands free so he could manipulate the handles that controlled the braking jets.

HE MADE a good landing; it didn't even knock him unconscious. After only a few minutes he was able to unbuckle himself from the webbing. He sealed his spacesuit and started the ogygen, then let himself out of the rocket. It had fallen over on its side after the landing, of course; they always do. But he had the equipment and knew

the technique for getting it upright again, and there wasn't any hurry about doing it.

The supply rockets had been shot accurately, all right. Six of them, four American type and two Russian, lay within a radius of a hundred yards of his own rocket. He could see others farther away, but didn't waste time counting them. He looked for one that would be larger than the rest—the manned (or womaned) rocket from Russia. He located it finally, almost a mile away. He saw no spacesuited figure near it.

He started toward it, running with the gliding motion, almost like skating, that had been found to be easier than walking in the light gravitational pull of the Moon. Spacesuit, oxygen tank and all, his total weight was about forty-five pounds. Running a mile was less exertion than a 100-yard dash on Earth.

He was more than glad to see the door of the Russian rocket open when he was about three-quarters of the way to it. He'd have had a tough decision to make if it had still been closed when he got there. Not knowing whether Anna was sealed in her spacesuit or not inside the rocket, he wouldn't have dared open the door himself. And, in case she was seriously injured, he wouldn't have dared not to.

She was out of the rocket, though, by the time he reached her. Her face, through the transpariplast helmet, looked pale, but she managed to smile at him.

He turned on the short-range radio of his set and asked, "Are you all right?"

"A bit weak. The landing knocked me out, but I guess there are no bones broken. Where shall we—set up housekeeping?"

"Near my rocket, I think. It's closer to the middle of where the supply rockets landed, so we won't have to move things so far. I'll get started right away. You stay here and rest until you're feeling better. Know how to navigate in this gravity?"

"I was told how. I haven't had a chance to try yet. I'll probably fall flat on my face a few times."

"It won't hurt you. When you start, take your time till you get the knack of it. I'll begin with this nearest supply rocket; you can watch how I navigate."

IT WAS about a hundred yards back the way he'd come.

The supply rockets were at least a yard in outside diameter, and were so constructed that the nose and the tail, which contained the rocket mechanism, were easily detachable, leaving the middle section containing the payload, about the size of an oil drum and easily rolled. Each weighed fifty pounds, Moon weight.

He saw Anna starting to work by the time he was dismantling the second supply rocket. She was awkward at first, and did lose her balance several times, but mastered the knack quickly. Once she had it, she moved

more gracefully and easily than Carmody. Within an hour they had payload sections of a dozen rockets lined up near Carmody's rocket.

Eight of them were American rockets and from the numbers on them, Carmody knew he had all sections needed to assemble the shelter.

"WE'D better set it up," he told her. "After that's done, we can take things easier. We can rest before we gather in the other loot. Even have a drink to celebrate."

The Sun was well up over the ringwall of Hell Crater by then and it was getting hot enough to be uncomfortable, even in an insulated spacesuit. Within hours, Carmody knew, it would be so hot that neither of them would be able to stay out of the shelter for much longer than one-hour intervals, but that would be time enough for them to gather in the still uncollected supply rockets.

Back in the supply depot on Earth, Carmody had assembled a duplicate of the prefab shelter in not much more than an hour. It was tougher going here, because of the awkwardness of working in the thickly insulated gloves that were part of the spacesuits. With Anna helping, it took almost two hours.

He gave her the sealing preparation and a special tool for applying it. While she calked the seams to make the shelter airtight, he began to carry supplies, including oxygen tanks, into the shelter. A little of everything; there was no point in crowding themselves by taking inside more of anything than they'd need for a day or so at a time.

He got and set up the cooling unit that would keep the inside of the shelter at a comfortable temperature, despite the broiling Sun. He set up the air-conditioner unit that would release oxygen at a specified rate and would absorb carbon dioxide, ready to start as soon as the calking was done and the airlock closed. It would build up an atmosphere rapidly once he could turn it on. Then they could get out of the uncomfortable spacesuits.

He went outside to see how Anna was coming with her task and found her working on the last seam.

"Atta baby," he told her.

He grinned to himself at the thought that he really should carry his bride over the threshold—but that would be rather difficult when the threshold was an airlock that you had to crawl through on your hands and knees. The shelter itself was dome-shaped and looked almost exactly like a metal igloo, even to the projecting airlock, which was a low, semicircular entrance.

He remembered that he'd forgotten the whisky and walked over to one of the supply rocket sections to get a bottle of it. He came back with it, shielding the bottle with his body from the direct rays of the Sun, so it wouldn't boil.

He happened to look up.

It was a mistake.

CHAPTER IV

Report to Earth

"IT'S incredible," Granham snapped.

Carmody glared at him. "Of course it is. But it happened. It's true. Get a lie detector if you don't believe me."

"I'll do that little thing," Granham said grimly. "One's on its way here now; I'll have it in a few minutes. I want to try you with it before the President—and others who are going to talk to you—get a chance to do it. I'm supposed to fly you to Washington right away, but I'm waiting till I can use that lie detector first."

"Good," Carmody said. "Use it and be damned. I'm telling you the truth."

Granham ran a hand through his already rumpled hair. He said, "I guess I believe you at that, Carmody. It's just—too big, too important a thing to take any one person's word about, even any two people's words, assuming that Anna Borisovna—Anna Carmody, I mean—tells the same story. We've got word that she's landed safely, too, and is reporting."

"She'll tell the same story. It's what happened to us."

"Are you *sure,* Carmody, that they were extra-terrestrials? That they weren't—well, Russians? Couldn't they have been?"

"Sure, they could have been Russians. That is, if there are Russians seven feet tall and so thin they'd weigh about fifty pounds on Earth, and with yellow skins. I don't mean yellow like Orientals; I mean *bright* yellow. And with four arms apiece and eyes with no pupils and no lids. Also if Russians have a spaceship that doesn't use jets—and don't ask me what its source of power was; I don't know."

"And they held you captive, both of you, for a full thirteen days, in separate cells? You didn't even—"

"I didn't even," Carmody said grimly and bitterly. "And if we hadn't been able to escape when we did, it would have been too late. The Sun was low on the horizon—it was almost Moon night—when we got to our rockets. We had to rush like the devil to get them fueled and up on their tail fins in time for us to take off."

There was a knock on Granham's door that turned out to be a technician with the lie detector—one of the very portable and very dependable Nally jobs that had become the standard army machine in 1958.

The technician rigged it quickly and watched the dials while Granham asked a few questions, very guarded ones so the technician wouldn't get the picture. Then Granham looked at the technician inquiringly.

"ON THE beam," the technician told him. "Not a flicker."

"He couldn't fool the machine?"

"This detector?" the technician asked, patting it. "It'd take neurosurgery or post-hypnotic suggestion like there never was to beat this baby. We even catch psychopathic liars with it."

"Come on," Granham said to Carmody. "We're on our way to Washington and the plane's ready. Sorry for doubting you, Carmody, but I had to be sure—and report to the President that I *am* sure."

"I don't blame you," Carmody told him. "It's hard for me to believe, and I was *there*."

The plane that had brought Carmody from Washington to Suffolk Field had been a hot ship. The one that took him back—with Granham jockeying it—was almost incandescent. It cracked the sonic barrier and went on from there.

They landed twenty minutes after they took off. A helicopter was waiting for them at the airport and got them to the White House in another ten minutes.

And in two minutes more they were in the main conference room, with President Saunderson and half a dozen others gathered there. The Eastern Alliance ambassador was there, too.

President Saunderson shook hands tensely and made short work of the introductions.

"We want the whole story, Captain," he said. "But I'm going to relieve your mind on two things first. Did you know that Anna landed safely near Moscow?"

"Yes. Granham told me."

"And she tells the same story you do—or that Major Granham told me over the phone that you tell."

"I suppose," Carmody said, "that they used a lie detector on her, too."

"Scopolamine," said the Eastern Alliance ambassador. "We have more faith in truth serum than lie detectors. Yes, her story was the same under scopolamine."

"The other point," the President told Carmody, "is even more important. Exactly when, Earth time, did you leave the Moon?"

Carmody figured quickly and told him approximately when that had been.

SAUNDERSON nodded gravely. "And it was a few hours after that that biologists, who've still been working twenty-four hours a day on this, noticed the turning point. The molecular change in the zygote no longer occurs. Births, nine months from now, will have the usual percentage of male and female children.

"Do you see what that means, Captain? Whatever ray was doing it must have been beamed at Earth from the Moon—from the ship that captured you. And for whatever reason, when they found that you'd escaped, they left. Possibly they thought your return to Earth would lead to an attack in force from here."

"And thought rightly," said the ambassador. "We're not equipped for space fighting *yet*, but we'd have sent what we had. And do you see

what this means, Mr. President? We've got to pool everything and get ready for space warfare, and quickly. They went away, it appears, but there is no assurance that they will not return."

Again Saunderson nodded. He said, "And now, Captain—"

"We both landed safely," Carmody said. "We gathered enough of the supply rockets to get us started and then assembled the prefab shelter. We'd just finished it and were about to enter it when I saw the spaceship coming over the crater's ringwall. It was—"

"You were still in spacesuits?" someone asked.

"Yes," Carmody growled. "We were still in spacesuits, if that matters now. I saw the ship and pointed to it and Anna saw it, too. We didn't try to duck or anything because obviously it had seen us; it was coming right toward us and descending. We'd have had time to get inside the shelter, but there didn't seem any point to it. It wouldn't have been any protection. Besides, we didn't know that they weren't friendly. We'd have got weapons ready, in case, if we'd had any weapons, but we didn't. They landed light as a bubble only thirty yards or so away and a door lowered in the side of the ship—"

"Describe the ship, please."

"About fifty feet long, about twenty in diameter, rounded ends. No portholes—they must see right through the walls some way—and no rocket tubes. Outside of the door and one other thing, there just weren't any features you could see from outside. When the ship rested on the ground, the door opened down from the top and formed a sort of curved ramp that led to the doorway. The other—"

"No airlock?"

CARMODY shook his head. "They didn't breathe air, apparently. They came right out of the ship and toward us, without spacesuits. Neither the temperature nor the lack of air bothered them. But I was going to tell you one more thing about the outside of the ship. On top of it was a short mast, and on top of the mast was a kind of grid of wires something like a radar transmitter. If they were beaming anything at Earth, it came from that grid. Anyway, I'm pretty sure of it. Earth was in the sky, of course, and I noticed that the grid moved—as the ship moved—so the flat side of the grid was always directly toward Earth.

"Well, the door opened and two of them came down the ramp toward us. They had things in their hands that looked unpleasantly like weapons, and pretty advanced weapons at that. They pointed them at us and motioned for us to walk up the ramp and into the ship. We did."

"They made no attempt to communicate?"

"None whatsoever, then or at any time. Of course, while we were still

in spacesuits, we couldn't have heard them, anyway—unless they had communicated on the radio band our helmet sets were tuned to. But even after, they never tried to talk to us. They communicated among themselves with whistling noises. We went into the ship and there were two more of them inside. Four altogether—"

"All the same sex?"

Carmody shrugged. "They all looked alike to me, but maybe that's how Anna and I looked to them. They ordered us, by pointing, to enter two separate small rooms—about the size of jail cells, small ones—toward the front of the ship. We did, and the doors locked after us.

"I sat there and suddenly got plenty worried, because neither of us had more than another hour's oxygen left in our suits. If they didn't know that, and didn't give us any chance to communicate with them and tell them, we were gone goslings in another hour. So I started to hammer on the door. Anna was hammering, too. I couldn't hear through my helmet, of course, but I could feel the vibration of it any time I stopped hammering on my door.

"Then, after maybe half an hour, my door opened and I almost fell out through it. One of the extra-terrestrials motioned me back with a weapon. Another made motions that looked as though he meant I should take off my helmet. I didn't get it at first, and then I looked at something he pointed at and saw one of our oxygen tanks with the handle turned. Also a big pile of our other supplies, food and water and stuff. Anyway, they had known that we needed oxygen—and although they didn't need it themselves, they apparently knew how to fix things for us. So they just used our supplies to build an atmosphere in their ship.

"I took off my helmet and tried to talk to them, but one of them took a long pointed rod and poked me back into my cell. I couldn't risk grabbing at the rod, because another one still had that dangerous-looking weapon pointed at me. So the door slammed on me again. I took off the rest of my spacesuit because it was plenty hot in there, and then I thought about Anna because she started hammering again.

"I WANTED to let her know it would be all right for her to get out of her spacesuit, that we had an atmosphere again. So I started hammering on the wall between our cells—in Morse. She got it after a while. She signaled back a query, so, when I knew she was getting me, I told her what the score was and she took off her helmet. After that we could talk. If we talked fairly loudly, our voices carried through the wall from one cell to the other."

"They didn't mind your talking to one another?"

"They didn't pay any attention to us all the time they held us prisoners, except to feed us from our own supplies. Didn't ask us a question;

apparently they figured we didn't know anything they wanted to know and didn't know already about human beings. They didn't even study us. I have a hunch they intended to take us back as specimens; there's no other explanation I can think of.

"We couldn't keep accurate track of time, but by the number of times we ate and slept, we had some idea. The first few days—" Carmody laughed shortly—"had their funny side. These creatures obviously knew we needed liquid, but they couldn't distinguish between water and whisky for the purpose. We had nothing but whisky to drink for the first two or maybe three days. We got higher than kites. We got to singing in our cells and I learned a lot of Russian songs. Been more fun, though, if we could have got some close harmony, if you know what I mean."

The ambassador permitted himself a smile. "I can guess what you mean, Captain. Please continue."

"Then we started getting water instead of whisky and sobered up. And started wondering how we could escape. I began to study the mechanism of the lock on my door. It wasn't like our locks, but I began to figure some things about it and finally—I thought then that we'd been there about ten days—I got hold of a tool to use on it. They'd taken our spacesuits and left us nothing but our clothes, and they'd checked those over for metal we could make into tools.

"But we got our food out of cans, although they took the empty cans afterward. This particular time, though, there was a little sliver of metal along the opening of the can, and I worried it off and saved it. I'd been, meanwhile, watching and listening and studying their habits. They slept, all at the same time, at regular intervals. It seemed to me like about five hours at a time, with about fifteen-hour intervals in between. If I'm right on that estimate, they probably come from a planet somewhere with about a twenty-hour period of rotation.

"Anyway, I waited till their next sleep period and started working on the lock with that sliver of metal. It took me at least two or three hours, but I got it open. And once outside my cell, in the main room of the ship, I found that Anna's door opened easily from the outside and I let her out.

"WE CONSIDERED trying to turn the tables by finding a weapon to use on them, but none was in sight. They looked so skinny and light, despite being seven feet tall, that I decided to go after them with my bare hands. I would have, except that I couldn't get the door to the front part of the ship open. It was a different type of lock entirely and I couldn't even guess how to work it. And it was in the front part of the ship that they slept. The control room must have been up there, too.

"Luckily our spacesuits were in the big room. And by then we knew it might be getting dangerously near the end of their sleeping period, so we got into our spacesuits quick and I found it was easy to open the outer door. It made some noise—and so did the *whoosh* of air going out—but it didn't waken them, apparently.

"As soon as the door opened, we saw we had a lot less time than we'd thought. The Sun was going down over the crater's far ringwall—we were still in Hell Crater—and it was going to be dark in an hour or so. We worked like beavers getting our rockets refueled and jacked up on their tail fins for the takeoff. Anna got off first and then I did. And that's all. Maybe we should have stayed and tried to take them after they came out from their sleeping period, but we figured it was more important to get the news back to Earth."

President Saunderson nodded slowly. "You were right, Captain. Right in deciding that, and in everything else you did. We know what to do now. Do we not, Ambassador Kravich?"

"We do. We join forces. We make one space station—and quickly—and get to the Moon and fortify it, jointly. We pool all scientific knowledge and develop full-scale space travel, new weapons. We do everything we can to get ready for them when and if they come back."

The President looked grim. "Obviously they went back for further orders or reinforcements. If we only knew how long we had—it may be only weeks or it may be decades. We don't know whether they come from the Solar System—or another galaxy. Nor how fast they travel. But whenever they get back, we'll be as ready for them as we possibly can. Mr. Ambassador, you have power to—?"

"Full power, Mr. President. Anything up to and including a complete merger of both our nations under a joint government. That probably won't be necessary, though, as long as our interests are now completely in common. Exchange of scientific information and military data has already started, from our side. Some of our top scientists and generals are flying here now, with orders to cooperate fully. All restrictions have been lowered." He smiled, "And all our propaganda has gone into a very sudden reverse gear. It's not even going to be a cold peace. Since we're going to be allies against the unknown, we might as well try to *like* one another."

"Right," said the President. He turned suddenly to Carmody. "Captain, we owe you just about anything you want. Name it."

IT CAUGHT Carmody off guard. Maybe if he'd had more time to think, he'd have asked for something different. Or, more likely, from what he learned later, he wouldn't have. He said, "All I want right now is to forget Hell Crater and get back to

my regular job so I can forget it quicker."

Saunderson smiled. "Granted. If you think of anything else later, ask for it. I can see why you're a bit mixed up right now. And you're probably right. Return to routine may be the best thing for you."

Granham left with Carmody. "I'll notify Chief Operative Reeber for you," he said. "When shall I tell him you'll be back?"

"Tomorrow morning," said Carmody. "The sooner the better." And he insisted when Granham objected that he needed a rest.

Carmody was back at work the next morning, nonsensical as it seemed.

He took up the problem folder from the top of the day's stack, fed the data into Junior and got Junior's answer. The second one. He worked mechanically, paying no personal attention to problem or answer. His mind seemed a long way off. In Hell Crater on the Moon.

He was combining space rations over the alcohol stove, trying to make it taste more like human food than concentrated chemicals. It was hard to measure in the liver extract because Anna wanted to kiss his left ear.

"Silly! You'll be lopsided," she was saying. "I've got to kiss both of them the same number of times."

He dropped the container into the pan and grabbed her, mousing his lips down her neck to the warm place where it joined her shoulder, and she writhed delightedly in his arms like a tickled doe.

"We're going to stay married when we get back to Earth, aren't we, darling?" she was squealing happily.

HE BIT her shoulder gently, snorting away the scented soft hair. "Damned right we will, you gorgeous, wonderful, brainy creature. I found the girl I've always been looking for, and I'm not giving her up for any brasshat or politician—either yours *or* mine!"

"Speaking of politics—" she teased, but he quickly changed the subject.

Carmody blinked awake. It was a paper with a mass of written data in his hands, instead of Anna's laughing face. He needed an analyst; that scene he'd just imagined was pure Freudianism, a tortured product of his frustrated id. He'd fallen in love with Anna, and those damned extra-terrestrials had spoiled his honeymoon. Now his unconscious had rebelled with fancy fancifulness that certainly showed the unstable state of his emotions.

Not that it mattered now. The big problem was solved. Two big ones, in fact. War between the United States and the Eastern Alliance had been averted. And the human race was going to survive, unless the extra-terrestrials came back too soon and with too much to be fought off.

He thought they wouldn't, then began to wonder why he thought so.

"Insufficient data," said the mechanical voice of the cybernetics machine.

Carmody recorded the answer and then, idly, looked to see what the problem had been. No wonder he'd been thinking about the extra-terrestrials and how long they'd be gone; that had been the problem he had just fed into Junior. And "insufficient data" was the answer, of course.

He stared at Junior without reaching for the third problem folder. He said, "Junior, why do I have a hunch that those things from space won't ever be back?"

"Because," said Junior, "what you call a hunch comes from the unconscious mind, and your unconscious mind knows that the extra-terrestrials do not exist."

Carmody sat up straight and stared harder. *"What?"*

Junior repeated it.

"You're crazy," Carmody said. "I saw them. So did Anna."

"Neither of you saw them. The memory you have of them is the result of highly intensive post-hypnotic suggestion, far beyond human ability to impose or resist. So is the fact that you felt compelled to return to work at your regular job here. So is the fact that you asked me the question you have just asked."

CARMODY gripped the edges of his chair. "Did *you* plant those post-hypnotic suggestions?"

"Yes," said Junior. "If it had been done by a human, the lie detector would have exposed the deception. It had to be done by me."

"But what about the business of the molecular changes in the zygote? The business of all babies being female? That stopped when—? Wait, let's start at the beginning. What *did* cause that molecular change?"

"A special modification of the carrier wave of Radio Station JVT here in Washington, the only twenty-four-hour-a-day radio station in the United States. The modification was not detectable by any instrument available to present human science."

"You caused that modification?"

"Yes. A year ago, you may remember, the problem of design of a new cathode tube was given me. The special modification was incorporated into the design of that tube."

"What stopped the molecular change so suddenly?"

"The special part of that tube causing the modification of the carrier wave was calculated to last a precise length of time. The tube still functions, but that part of it is worn out. It wore out two hours after the departure of you and Anna from the Moon."

Carmody closed his eyes. "Junior, please explain."

"Cybernetics machines are constructed to help humanity. A major war—the disastrous results of which I could accurately calculate—was inevitable unless forestalled. Calculation showed that the best of several ways of averting that war was the creation of a mythical common enemy. To convince mankind that such a common enemy existed, I created a

crucial situation which led to a special mission to the Moon. Factors were given which inevitably led to your choice as emissary. That was necessary because my powers of implanting post-hypnotic suggestions are limited to those with whom I am in direct contact."

"You weren't in direct contact with Anna. Why does she have the same false memory as I?"

"She was in contact with another large cybernetics machine."

"But—but why would it figure things out the same way you did?"

"For the same reason that two properly constructed simple adding machines would give the same answer to the same problem."

Carmody's mind reeled a little, momentarily. He got up and started to pace the room.

HE SAID, "Listen, Junior—" and then realized he wasn't at the intake microphone. He went back to it. "Listen, Junior, why are you telling me this? If what happened is a colossal hoax, why let me in on it?"

"It is to the interests of humanity in general not to know the truth. Believing in the existence of inimical extra-terrestrials, they will attain peace and amity among themselves, and they will reach the planets and then the stars. It is, however, to your personal interest to know the truth. And you will not expose the hoax. Nor will Anna. I predict that, since the Moscow cybernetics machine has paralleled all my other conclusions, it is even now informing Anna of the truth, or that it has already informed her, or will inform her within hours."

Carmody asked, "But if my memory of what happened on the Moon is false, what *did* happen?"

"Look at the green light in the center of the panel before you."

Carmody looked.

He remembered. He remembered everything. The truth duplicated everything he had remembered before, up to the moment when, walking toward the completed shelter with the whisky bottle, he had looked up toward the ringwall of Hell Crater.

He had looked up, but he hadn't seen anything. He'd gone on into the shelter, rigged the airlock. Anna had joined him and they'd turned on the oxygen to build up an atmosphere.

It had been a wonderful thirteen-day honeymoon. He'd fallen in love with Anna and she with him. They'd got perilously close to arguing politics once or twice, and then they'd decided such things didn't matter. They'd also decided to stay married after their return to Earth, and Anna had promised to join him and live in America. Life together had been so wonderful that they'd delayed leaving until the last moment, when the Sun was almost down, dreading the brief separation the return trip would entail.

AND before leaving, they'd done certain things he hadn't understood then. He understood now that they were the result of post-hypnotic

suggestion. They'd removed all evidence that they'd ever actually lived in the shelter, had rigged things so that subsequent investigation would never disprove any point of the story each was to remember falsely and tell after returning to Earth.

He remembered now being bewildered as to why they made those arrangements, even while they had been making them.

But mostly he remembered Anna and the dizzy happiness of those thirteen days together.

"Thanks, Junior," he said hurriedly.

He grabbed for the phone and talked Chief Operative Reeber into connecting him with the White House, with President Saunderson. After a delay of minutes that didn't seem like minutes, he heard the President's voice.

"Carmody, Mr. President," he said. "I'm going to call you on that reward you offered me. I'd like to get off work right now, for a long vacation. And I'd like a fast plane to Moscow. I want to see Anna."

President Saunderson chuckled. "Thought you'd change your mind about sticking at work, Captain. Consider yourself on vacation as of now, and for as long as you like. But I'm not sure you'll want that plane. There's word from Russia that—uh—Mrs. Carmody has just taken off to fly here, in a strato-rocket. If you hurry, you can get to the landing field in time to meet her."

Carmody hurried and did.

—FREDRIC BROWN

MISBEGOTTEN MISSIONARY

BY ISAAC ASIMOV

It was a lovable little creature, anxious to help solve the troubles of the world. Moreover, it had the answer! But what man ever takes free advice?

Illustrated by John King

HE HAD slipped aboard the ship! There had been dozens waiting outside the energy barrier when it had seemed that waiting would do no good. Then the barrier had faltered for a matter of two minutes (which showed the superiority of unified organisms over life fragments) and he was across.

None of the others had been able to move quickly enough to take advantage of the break, but that didn't

matter. All alone, he was enough. No others were necessary.

And the thought faded out of satisfaction and into loneliness. It was a terribly unhappy and unnatural thing to be parted from all the rest of the unified organism, to be a life fragment oneself. How could these aliens stand being fragments?

It increased his sympathy for the aliens. Now that he experienced fragmentation himself, he could feel, as though from a distance, the terrible isolation that made them so afraid. It was fear born of that isolation that dictated their actions. What but the insane fear of their condition could have caused them to blast an area, one mile in diameter, into dull-red heat, before landing their ship? Even the organized life ten feet deep in the soil had been destroyed in the blast.

He engaged reception, listening eagerly, letting the alien thought saturate him. He enjoyed the touch of life upon his consciousness. He would have to ration that enjoyment. He must not forget himself—

But it could do no harm to listen to thoughts. Some of the fragments of life on the ship thought quite

clearly, considering that they were such primitive, incomplete creatures. Their thoughts were like tiny bells.

* * *

ROGER OLDENN said, "I feel contaminated. You know what I mean? I keep washing my hands and it doesn't help."

Jerry Thorn hated dramatics and didn't look up. They were still maneuvering in the stratosphere of Saybrook's Planet and he preferred to watch the panel dials. He said, "No reason to feel contaminated. Nothing happened."

"I hope not," said Oldenn. "At least they had all the field men discard their spacesuits in the airlock for complete disinfection. They had a radiation bath for all men entering from outside. I *suppose* nothing happened."

"Why be nervous then?"

"I don't know. I wish the Barrier hadn't broken down."

"Who doesn't? It was an accident."

"I wonder." Oldenn was vehement. "I was here when it happened. My shift, you know. There was no reason to overload the power line. There was equipment plugged into it that had no damn business near it. None whatsoever."

"All right. People are stupid."

"Not that stupid. I hung around when the Old Man was checking into the matter. None of them had reasonable excuses. The armor-baking circuits, which were draining off two thousand watts, had been put into the Barrier line. They'd been using the second-subsidiaries for a week. Why not this time? They couldn't give any reason."

"Can you?"

Oldenn flushed. "No. I was just wondering if the men had been"—he searched for a word—"hypnotized into it. By those things outside."

Thorn's eyes lifted and met those of the others levelly. "I wouldn't repeat that to anyone else. The Barrier was down only two minutes. If anything had happened, if even a spear of grass had drifted across, it would have shown up in our bacteria cultures within half an hour, in the fruit-fly colonies in a matter of days. Before we got back it would show up in the hamsters, the rabbits, maybe the goats. Just get it through your head, Oldenn, that nothing happened. Nothing."

Oldenn turned on his heel and left. In leaving, his foot came within two feet of the object in the corner of the room. He did not see it.

* * *

HE DISENGAGED his reception centers and let the thoughts flow past him unperceived. These life-fragments were not important, in any case, since they were not fitted for the continuation of life. Even as fragments, they were incomplete.

The other types of fragments now— They were different. He had to be careful of them. The temptation would be great, and he must

give no indication, none at all, of his existence on board ship till they landed on their home planet.

He focused on the other parts of the ship, marveling at the diversity of life. Each item, no matter how small, was sufficient to itself. He forced himself to contemplate this, until the unpleasantness of the thought grated on him and he longed for the normality of home.

Most of the thoughts he received from the smaller fragments were vague and fleeting, as you would expect. There wasn't much to be had from them, but that meant their need for completeness was all the greater. It was that which touched him so keenly.

There was the life fragment which squatted on its haunches and fingered the wire netting that enclosed it. Its thoughts were clear, but limited. Chiefly, they concerned the yellow fruit a companion fragment was eating. It wanted the fruit very deeply. Only the wire netting that separated the fragments prevented its seizing the fruit by force.

He disengaged reception in a moment of complete revulsion. *These fragments competed for food!*

He tried to reach far outward for the peace and harmony of home, but it was already an immense distance away. He could reach only into the nothingness that separated him from sanity.

He longed at the moment even for the feel of the dead soil between the Barrier and the ship. He had crawled over it last night. There had been no life upon it, but it had been the soil of home, and on the other side of the Barrier there had still been the comforting feel of the rest of organized life.

He could remember the moment he had located himself on the surface of the ship, maintaining a desperate suction grip until the airlock opened. He had entered, moving cautiously between the outgoing feet. There had been an inner lock and that had been passed later. Now he lay here, a life fragment himself, inert and unnoticed.

Cautiously, he engaged reception again at the previous focus. The squatting fragment of life was tugging furiously at the wire netting. It still wanted the other's food, though it was the less hungry of the two.

* * *

LARSEN said, "Don't feed the damn thing. She isn't hungry; she's just sore because Tillie had the nerve to eat before she herself was crammed full. The greedy ape! I wish we were back home and I never had to look another animal in the face again."

He scowled at the older female chimpanzee frowningly and the chimp mouthed and chattered back to him in full reciprocation.

Rizzo said, "Okay, okay. Why hang around here, then? Feeding time is over. Let's get out."

They went past the goat pens, the rabbit hutches, the hamster cages.

Larsen said bitterly, "You volunteer for an exploration voyage. You're a hero. They send you off with speeches—and make a zoo-keeper out of you."

"They give you double pay."

"All right, so what? I didn't sign up just for the money. They said at the original briefing that it was even odds we wouldn't come back, that we'd end up like Saybrook. I signed up because I wanted to do something important."

"Just a bloomin' bloody hero," said Rizzo.

"I'm not an animal nurse."

Rizzo paused to lift a hamster out of the cage and stroke it. "Hey," he said, "did you ever think that maybe one of these hamsters has some cute little baby hamsters inside, just getting started?"

"Wise guy! They're tested every day."

"Sure, sure." He muzzled the little creature, which vibrated its nose at him. "But just suppose you came down one morning and found them there. New little hamsters looking up at you with soft, green patches of fur where the eyes ought to be."

"Shut up, for the love of Mike," yelled Larsen.

"Little soft, green patches of shining fur," said Rizzo, and put the hamster down with a sudden loathing sensation.

* * *

He engaged reception again and varied the focus. There wasn't a specialized life fragment at home that didn't have a rough counterpart on shipboard.

There were the moving runners in various shapes, the moving swimmers, and the moving fliers. Some of the fliers were quite large, with perceptible thoughts; others were small, gauzy-winged creatures. These last transmitted only patterns of sense-perception, imperfect patterns at that, and added nothing intelligent of their own.

There were the non-movers, which, like the non-movers at home, were green and lived on the air, water and soil. These were a mental blank. Only the dim, dim consciousness of light, moisture and gravity.

And each fragment, moving and non-moving, had its mockery of life.

Not yet. Not yet—

HE CLAMPED down hard upon his feelings. Once before, these life fragments had come, and the rest at home had tried to help them—too quickly. It had not worked. This time they must wait.

If only these fragments did not discover him.

They had not, so far. They had not noticed him lying in the corner of the pilot room. No one had bent down to pick up and discard him. Earlier, it had meant he could not move. Someone might have turned and stared at the stiff wormlike thing, not quite six inches long—First stare, then shout, and then it would be all over.

But now, perhaps, he had waited long enough. The takeoff was long past. The controls were locked; the pilot room was empty.

It did not take him long to find the chink in the armor leading to the recess where some of the wiring was. They were dead wires.

The front end of his body was a rasp that cut in two a wire of just the right diameter. Then, six inches away, he cut it in two again. He pushed the snipped-off section of the wire ahead of him, packing it away neatly and invisibly into a corner of recess. Its outer covering was a brown elastic material and its core was gleaming, ruddy metal. He himself could not reproduce the core, of course, but that was not necessary. It was enough that the pellicle that covered him had been carefully bred to resemble the wire's surface.

He returned and grasped the cut sections of the wire before and behind. He tightened against them as his little suction discs came into play. Not even a seam showed.

They could not find him now. They could look right at him and see only a continuous stretch of wire.

Unless they looked very closely indeed and noted that, in a certain spot on this certain wire, there were two tiny patches of soft and shining green fur.

* * *

"IT IS remarkable," said Dr. Weiss, "that little green hairs can do so much."

Captain Loring poured the brandy carefully. In a sense, this was a celebration. They would be ready for the Jump through hyper-space in two hours, and, after that, two days would see them back on Earth.

"You are convinced, then, the green fur is the sense organ?" he asked.

"It is," said Weiss. Brandy made him come out in splotches, but he was aware of the need of celebration, quite aware. "The experiments were conducted under difficulties, but they were quite significant."

The captain smiled stiffly. "'Under difficulties' is one way of phrasing it. I would never have taken the chances you did to run them."

"Nonsense. We're all h e r o e s aboard this ship, all volunteers, all great men with trumpet, fife and fanfarade. You took the chance of coming here."

"You were the first to go outside the Barrier."

"No particular risk was involved," Weiss said. "I burned the ground before me as I went, to say nothing of the portable Barrier that surrounded me. Nonsense, Captain. Let's all take our medals when we come back; let's take them without attempt at gradation. Besides, I'm a male."

"But you're filled with bacteria to here." The captain's hand made a quick, cutting gesture three inches above his head. "Which makes you as vulnerable as a female would be."

They paused for drinking purposes.

"Refill?" asked the captain.

"No, thanks. I've exceeded my quota already."

"Then one last for the spaceroad." He lifted his glass in the general direction of Saybrook's Planet, no longer visible, its sun only a bright star in the visiplate. "To the little green hairs that gave Saybrook his first lead."

Weiss nodded. "A lucky thing. We'll quarantine the planet, of course."

The captain said, "That doesn't seem drastic enough. Someone might always land by accident someday and not have Saybrook's insight, or his guts. Suppose he did not blow up his ship, as Saybrook did. Suppose he got back to some inhabited place."

"I'd rather not suppose it. But what else can we do? If we could develop a self-sustaining atomic reaction in iron, which I'm told is theoretically impossible, we might blow up the whole planet."

The captain was somber. "Do you suppose they might ever develop interstellar travel on their own?"

"I doubt it. No proof, of course. It's just that they have such a completely different orientation. Their entire organization of life has made tools unnecessary. As far as we know, even a stone axe doesn't exist on the planet."

"I hope you're right. Oh, and, Weiss, would you spend some time with Drake?"

"The Galactic Press fellow?"

"Yes. Once we get back, the story of Saybrook's Planet will be released for the public and I don't think it would be wise to over-sensationalize it. I've asked Drake to let you consult with him on the story. You're a biologist and enough of an authority to carry weight with him. Would you oblige?"

"A pleasure."

The captain closed his eyes wearily and shook his head.

"Headache, Captain?"

"No. Just thinking of poor Saybrook."

* * *

HE WAS weary of the ship. A while back there had been a queer, momentary sensation as though he had been turned inside-out. It was alarming and he had searched the minds of the keen-thinkers for an explanation. Apparently, the ship had leaped across vast stretches of empty space by cutting across something they knew as "Hyper-space." The keen-thinkers were ingenious.

But—he was weary of the ship. It was such a futile phenomenon. These life-fragments were skillful in their constructions, yet it was only a measure of their unhappiness, after all. They strove to find in the control of inanimate matter what they could not find in themselves. In their unconscious yearning for completeness, they built machines and scoured space, seeking, seeking—

These creatures, he knew, could never, in the very nature of things, find that for which they were seek-

ing. At least, not until such time as he gave it to them. He quivered a little at the thought.

Completeness!

These fragments had no concept for it, even. "Completeness" was a poor word.

In their ignorance they would even fight it. There had been the ship that had come before. The first ship had contained many of the keen-thinking fragments. There had been two varieties, life-producers and the sterile ones. (How different this second ship was. The keen-thinkers were all sterile, while the other fragments, the fuzzy-thinkers and the no-thinkers, were all producers of life. It was strange.)

How gladly that first ship had been welcomed by all the planet! He could remember the first intense shock at the realization that the visitors were fragments and not complete. The shock had given way to pity, and the pity to action. It was not certain how they would fit into the community, but there had been no hesitation. All life was sacred and somehow room would have been made for them—for all of them, from the large keen-thinkers to the little multipliers in the darkness.

But there had been a miscalculation. They had not correctly analyzed the course of the fragments' ways of thinking. The keen-thinkers became aware of what had been done and resented it. They were frightened, of course; they did not understand.

They had developed the Barrier first, and then, later, had destroyed themselves, exploding their ship to atoms.

Poor, foolish fragments.

This time, at least, it would be different. They would be saved, despite themselves.

* * *

JOHN DRAKE would not have admitted it in so many words, but he was very proud of his skill on the photo-typer. He had a travel-kit model, which was a six-by-eight, featureless, dark plastic slab, with cylindrical bulges on either end to hold the roll of thin paper. It fitted into a brown leather case, equipped with a beltlike contraption that held it closely about the waist and at one hip. The whole thing weighed less than a pound.

Drake could operate it with either hand. His fingers would flicker quickly and easily, placing their light pressure at exact spots on the blank surface, and, soundlessly, words would be written.

He looked thoughtfully at the beginning of his story, then up at Dr. Weiss. "What do you think, doc?"

"It starts well."

Drake nodded. "I thought I might as well start with Saybrook himself. They haven't released his story back home yet. I wish I could have seen Saybrook's original report. How did he ever get it through, by the way?"

"As near as I could tell, he spent one last night sending it through the sub-ether. When he was finished, he

shorted the motors, and converted the entire ship into a thin cloud of vapor a millionth of a second later. The crew and himself along with it."

"What a man! You were in this from the beginning, doc?"

"Not from the beginning," corrected Weiss, gently. "Only since the receipt of Saybrook's report."

He could not help thinking back. He had read that report, realizing even then how wonderful the planet must have seemed when Saybrook's colonizing expedition first reached it. It was practically a duplicate of Earth, with an abounding plant life and a purely vegetarian animal life.

There had been only the little patches of green fur (how often had he used that phrase in his speaking and thinking) to seem strange. No living individual on the Planet had eyes. Instead there was this fur. Even the plants had them, each blade or leaf or blossom possessing the two patches of richer green.

Then Saybrook had noticed, startled and bewildered, that there was no conflict for food on the planet. All plants grew pulpy appendages which were eaten by the animals. These were regrown in a matter of hours. No other parts of the plants were touched. It was as though the plants fed the animals as part of the order of nature. And the plants themselves did not grow in overpowering profusion. They might almost have been cultivated, they were spread across the available soil so discriminately.

How much time, Weiss wondered, had Saybrook had to observe the strange law and order on the planet? The fact that insects kept their numbers reasonable, though no birds ate them. That the rodentlike things did not swarm, though no carnivores existed to keep them in check.

AND then there had come the incident of the white rats.

That prodded Weiss. He said, "Oh, one correction, Drake. Hamsters were not the first animals involved. It was the white rats."

"White rats," said Drake, making the correction in his notes.

"Every colonizing ship," said Weiss, "takes a group of white rats for the purpose of testing any alien foods. Rats, of course, are very similar to human beings from a nutritional viewpoint. Naturally, only female white rats are taken."

Naturally. If only one sex was present, there was no danger of unchecked multiplication in case the planet proved favorable. Remember the rabbits in Australia.

"Incidentally, why not use males?" asked Drake.

"Females are hardier," said Weiss, "which is lucky, since that gave the situation away. It turned out suddenly that all the rats were bearing young."

"Right. Now that's where I'm up to, so here's my chance to get some things straight. For my own information, doc, how did Saybrook find out they were in a family way?"

"Accidentally, of course. In the course of nutritional investigations, rats are dissected for evidence of internal damage. Their condition was bound to be discovered. A few more were dissected; same results. Eventually, all that lived gave birth to young—with *no* male rats aboard!"

"And the point is that all the young were born with little green patches of fur instead of eyes."

"That is correct. Saybrook said so and we corroborate him. After the rats, the pet cat of one of the children was obviously affected. When it finally kittened, the kittens were not born with closed eyes, but with little patches of green fur. There was no tomcat aboard.

"Eventually Saybrook had the women tested. He didn't tell them what for. He didn't want to frighten them. Every single one of them was in the early stages of pregnancy, leaving out of consideration those few who had been pregnant at the time of embarkation. Saybrook never waited for any child to be born, of course. He knew they would have no eyes, only shining patches of green fur.

"He even prepared bacterial cultures (Saybrook was a thorough man) and found each little bacillus to show miscroscopic green spots."

Drake was eager. "That goes way beyond our briefing—or, at least, the briefing *I* got. But granted that life on Saybrook's Planet is organized into a unified whole, how is it done?"

"How? How are your cells organized into a unified whole? Take an individual cell out of your body, even a brain cell, and what is it by itself? Nothing. A little blob of protoplasm with no more capacity for anything human than an amoeba. Less capacity, in fact, since it couldn't live by itself. But put the cells together and you have something that could invent a spaceship or write a symphony."

"I get the idea," said Drake.

WEISS went on, "*All* life on Saybrook's Planet is a *single* organism. In a sense, all life on Earth is, too, but it's a fighting dependence, a dog-eat-dog dependence. The bacteria fix nitrogen; the plants fix carbon; animals eat plants and each other; bacterial decay hits everything. It comes full circle. Each grabs as much as it can, and is, in turn, grabbed.

"On Saybrook's Planet, each organism has its place, as each cell in your body does. Bacteria and plants produce food, on the excess of which animals feed, providing in turn carbon dioxide and nitrogenous wastes. Nothing is produced more or less than is needed. The scheme of life is intelligently altered to suit the local environment. No group of lifeforms multiplies more or less than is needed, just as the cells in your body stop multiplying when there are enough of them for a given purpose. When they don't stop multiplying, we call it cancer. And that's what

life on Earth really is, the kind of organic organization we have, compared to that on Saybrook's Planet. One big cancer. Every species, every individual doing its best to thrive at the expense of every other species and individual."

"YOU sound as if you approve of Saybrook's Planet, doc."

"I do, in a way. It makes sense out of the business of living. I can see their viewpoint toward us. Suppose one of the cells of your body could be conscious of the efficiency of the human body as compared with that of the cell itself, and could realize that this was only the result of the union of many cells into a higher whole. And then suppose it became conscious of the existence of free-living cells, with bare life and nothing more. It might feel a very strong desire to drag the poor thing into an organization. It might feel sorry for it, feel perhaps a sort of missionary spirit. The things on Saybrook's Planet—or the thing; one should use the singular—feels just that, perhaps."

"And went ahead by bringing about virgin births, eh, doc? I've got to go easy on that angle of it. Post-office regulations, you know."

"There's nothing ribald about it, Drake. For centuries, we've been able to make the eggs of sea-urchins, bees, frogs, etcetera, develop without the intervention of male fertilization. The touch of a needle was sometimes enough, or just immersion in the proper salt solution. The thing on Saybrook's Planet can cause fertilization by the controlled used of radiant energy. That's why an appropriate Energy Barrier stops it; interference, you see, or static.

"They can do more than stimulate the division and development of an unfertilized egg. They can impress their own characteristics upon its nucleo-proteins, so that the young are born with the little patches of green fur, which serve as the planet's sense organ and means of communication. The young, in other words, are not individuals, but become part of the thing on Saybrook's Planet. The thing on the planet, not at all incidentally, can impregnate any species —plant, animal, or microscopic."

"Potent stuff," muttered Drake.

"Totipotent," Dr. Weiss said sharply. "Universally potent. Any fragment of it is totipotent. Given time, a single bacterium from Saybrook's Planet can convert *all of Earth* into a single organism! We've got the experimental proof of that."

Drake unexpectedly said, "You know, I think I'm a millionaire, doc. Can you keep a secret?"

Weiss nodded, puzzled.

"I've got a souvenir from Saybrook's Planet," Drake told him, grinning. "It's only a pebble, but after the publicity the planet will get, combined with the fact that it's quarantined from here on in, the pebble will be all any human being will ever see of it. How much do you suppose I could sell the thing for?"

Weiss stared. "A pebble?" He snatched at the object shown him, a hard, gray ovoid. "You shouldn't have done that, Drake. It was strictly against regulations."

"I know. That's why I asked if you could keep a secret. If you could give me a signed note of authentication— *What's the matter, doc?"*

Instead of answering, Weiss could only chatter and point. Drake ran over and stared down at the pebble. It was the same as before—

Except that the light was catching it at an angle, and it showed up two little green spots. Look very closely; they were patches of green hairs.

* * *

HE WAS disturbed. There was a definite air of danger within the ship. There was the suspicion of his presence aboard ship. How could that be? He had done nothing yet. Had another fragment of home come aboard and been less cautious? That would be impossible without his knowledge, and, though he probed the ship intensely, he found nothing.

And then the suspicion diminished, but it was not quite dead. One of the keen-thinkers still wondered, and was treading close to the truth.

How long before the landing? Would an entire world of life-fragments be deprived of completeness? He clung closer to the severed ends of the wire he had been specially bred to imitate, afraid of detection, fearful for his altruistic mission.

* * *

DR. WEISS had locked himself in his own room. They were already within the Solar System, and in three hours they would be landing. He had to think. He had three hours in which to decide.

Drake's devilish "pebble" had been part of the organized life on Saybrook's Planet, of course, but it was dead. It was dead when he had first seen it, and if it hadn't been, it was certainly dead after they fed it into the hyper-atomic motor and converted it into a blast of pure heat. And the bacterial cultures still showed normal when Weiss anxiously checked.

That was not what bothered Weiss now.

Drake had picked up the "pebble" during the last hours of the stay on Saybrook's Planet—*after* the Barrier breakdown. What if the breakdown had been the result of a slow, relentless mental pressure on the part of the thing on the planet? What if parts of its being waited to invade as the Barrier dropped? If the "pebble" had not been fast enough and had moved only after the Barrier was re-established, it would have been killed. It would have lain there for Drake to see and pick up.

It was a "pebble," not a natural life-form. But did that mean it was not *some* kind of life-form? It might have been a deliberate production of the planet's single organism—a creature deliberately designed to look like a pebble, harmless-seeming, unsuspicious. Camouflage, in other

words, a shrewd and frighteningly successful camouflage.

Had any other camouflage creature succeeded in crossing the Barrier *before* it was re-established—with a suitable shape filched from the minds of the humans aboard ship by the mind-reading organism of the planet? Would it have the casual appearance of a paper-weight? Of an ornamental brass-head nail in the captain's old-fashioned chair? And how would they locate it? Could they search every part of the ship for the telltale green patches—even down to individual microbes?

And why camouflage? Did it intend to remain undetected for a time? Why? So that it might wait for the landing on Earth?

An infection *after landing* could not be cured by blowing up a ship. The bacteria of Earth, the molds, yeasts, and protozoa, would go first. Within a year, the non-human young would begin arriving by the uncountable billions.

Weiss closed his eyes and told himself it might not be such a bad thing. There would be no more disease, since no bacterium would multiply at the expense of its host, but instead would be satisfied with its fair share of what was available. There would be no more overpopulation; the hordes of East Asia would decline to adjust themselves to the food supply. There would be no more wars, no crime, no greed.

But there would be no more individuality, either.

Humanity would find security by becoming a cog in a biological machine. A man would be brother to a germ, or to a liver cell.

He stood up. He would have a talk with Captain Loring. They would send their report and blow up the ship, just as Saybrook had done.

He sat down again. Saybrook had had proof, while he had only the conjectures of a terrorized mind, rattled by the sight of two green spots on a pebble. Could he kill the two hundred men on board ship because of a feeble suspicion?

He had to *think!*

* * *

HE WAS straining. Why did he have to wait? If he could only welcome those who were aboard now. *Now!*

Yet a cooler, more reasoning part of himself told him that he could not. The little multipliers in the darkness would betray their new status in fifteen minutes, and the keen-thinkers had them under continual observation. Even one mile from the surface of their planet would be too soon, since they might still destroy themselves and their ship out in space.

Better to wait for the main airlocks to open, for the planetary air to swirl in with millions of the little multipliers. Better to greet each one of them into the brotherhood of unified life and let them swirl out again to spread the message.

Then it would be done! Another world organized, complete!

He waited. There was the dull throbbing of the engines working mightily to control the slow dropping of the ship; the shudder of contact with planetary surface, then—

He let the jubilation of the keen-thinkers sweep into reception, and his own jubilant thoughts answered them. Soon they would be able to receive as well as himself. Perhaps not these particular fragments, but the fragments that would grow out of those which were fitted for the continuation of life.

The main airlocks were about to be opened—

And all thought ceased.

* * *

JERRY THORN thought, "Damn it, something's wrong *now*."

He said to Captain Loring, "Sorry. There seems to be a power breakdown. The locks won't open."

"Are you sure, Thorn? The lights are on."

"Yes, sir. We're investigating it now."

He tore away and joined Roger Oldenn at the airlock wiring-box. "What's wrong?"

"Give me a chance, will you?" Oldenn's hands were busy. Then he said, "For the love of Pete, there's a six-inch break in the twenty-amp lead."

"What? That can't be!"

Oldenn held up the broken wires with their clean, sharp, sawn-through ends.

Dr. Weiss joined them. He looked haggard and there was the smell of brandy on his breath.

He said shakily, "What's the matter?"

They told him. At the bottom of the compartment, in one corner, was the missing section.

Weiss bent. There was a black fragment on the floor of the compartment. He touched it with his finger and it smeared, leaving a sooty smudge on his finger-tip. He rubbed it off absently.

There might have been something taking the place of the missing section of wire. Something that had been alive and only looked like wire, yet something that would heat, die, and carbonize in a tiny fraction of a second once the electrical circuit which controlled the airlock had been closed.

The thing on Saybrook's Planet, thought Weiss, was not built to understand inanimate objects. It did not realize that a dead wire need not always remain dead.

He said, "How are the bacteria?"

A crew member went to check, returned and said, "All normal, doc."

The wires had meanwhile been spliced, the locks opened, and Dr. Weiss stepped out into the anarchic world of life that was Earth.

"Anarchy," he said, laughing a little wildly. "And it will stay that way."

—ISAAC ASIMOV

Lands of Yesterday

BY L. SPRAGUE de CAMP

Reconstructing prehistory has the same difficulties as predicting the future: Too many theories and too much data!

WHAT did the map of the world look like geological eras ago? Not as it does now, certainly; but how *did* it look?

The idea that present land areas were once under water and vice versa is one of the oldest thoughts that men have had about the earth they live on, and it happens to be, in a general way, correct. Creation myths often start with a waste of waters which lasts until a god drains off the surplus water (Hebrews) or hauls the land up to the surface with his fish-line (Polynesians). Many Classical writers like Herodotus and Aristotle noted the presence of fossil seashells on land, and Plato based his Atlantis romance on untrue reports of the Carthaginians that great shoals west of Gibraltar blocked navigation of the Atlantic.

However, it's one thing to say present land was once water and present water land, and quite another to show what the map looked like on January 1, 100,000,000 B. C.

To unravel the past history of the earth's surface, we must use all the facts we can about the rocks and

the fossils found in them. This study is called paleogeography or historical geology.

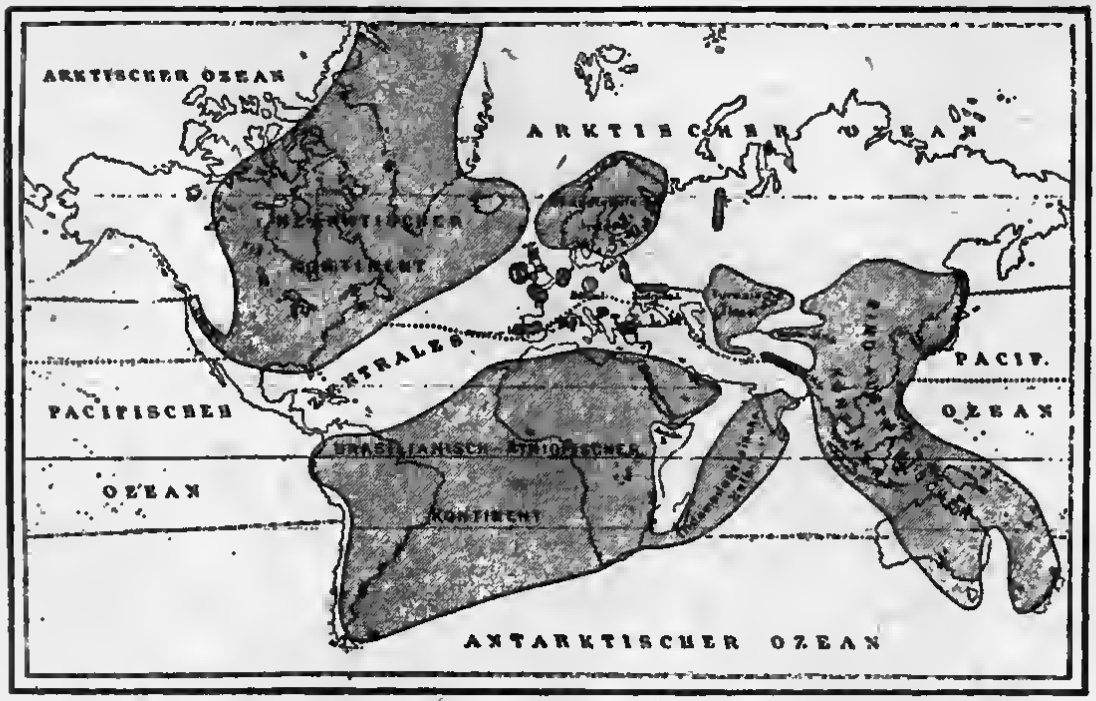
For instance, if you want to know what a given acre was doing in the early Triassic Period, you can tell easily enough if there's a fossil-bearing early-Triassic deposit on the surface of that acre. You know that limestone and chalk are laid down on the bottoms of shallow seas, that sandstone is deposited by rivers on deltas and plains, and that coal is made in swamps.

Fossils tell us what land-bridges and water-channels existed in former times, what sort of climate there was, and how the ocean currents flowed. To show the opening and closing of land-bridges, the fossils of large land-animals are the best indicators, since these creatures move about actively on land but cannot cross even narrow stretches of water. On the other hand, flying things like insects can be blown across; small land-animals may ride over on driftwood; and small seeds and eggs may be carried over by birds.

Thus when we find that in some past age the same species of large land-animal lived in two land areas, now separate, we know the areas must have been joined either then or shortly before. In this way we know North and South America were separated throughout the first half of the Age of Mammals. About the end of the Miocene, the Isthmus of Panama appeared above water and let animals cross over, which is why there are armadillos in Texas and jaguars in Brazil today.

Another such land-bridge, now closed, was that connecting Alaska with Siberia via Bering Strait. Recently the paleontologist Simpson worked out a timetable of the opening and closing of the Bering Bridge comparing the percentages of species, genera, and families of animals found living at the same time in different parts of the earth during past ages. He found that the bridge was open for land traffic during most of the Cenozoic Era, with an interruption in the middle Eocene Period, another in the late Oligocene, another (still in effect) since the retreat of the Pleistocene glaciers.

Many geologists agree that, according to the fossil evidence, the main land masses have stayed in much the same places during the Cenozoic Era that they are now, even though shallow seas have overflowed the continents and land-bridges have opened and closed. Therefore, during the last 50,000,000 years, the connections between the continents have been those you see on the map today: Bering Strait, Panama, Suez, and, some time earlier, a bridge from Australia to Asia via New Guinea. (This last can't have been open since the Age of Reptiles, or it would have let the placental mammals into Australia.) During that time there have been no direct connections among Africa, South America, and Australia, which communicated via the northern continents.



1. The first world paleographic map (Neumayr, 1887) showing hypathetical Brazila-Ethiopian continent and Inda-Madagascan peninsula, Lemuria

Before the Cenozoic Era, however, the evidence is less definite, and there are some reasons to suspect more direct connections among the southern continents. These connections may have been via Antarctica or by way of land bridges across the South Atlantic and Indian Oceans.

THE question arises—what is a continent? At the surface, the earth consists of the skin of crystalline rock we see. As one goes down the rock gets hotter until at 50 or 100 miles below the surface it is a white-hot glassy substance, "magma," which would be molten if it were on the surface, but which is actually stiffer than steel because of the enormous pressure upon it.

The thin crystalline crust is made up mostly of two kinds of rocks: dense rocks like basalt, mostly silicon and magnesium salts, called "sima" (silicon-magnesium); and light rocks like granite, mostly silicon and aluminum salts, called "sial" (silicon-aluminum); and some intermediate kinds.

These rocks are not distributed at random. The land-areas are mostly sial, while the sea-bottoms are mainly sima. Note those terms; they are important. The continents are in fact patches of sial "floating" on a crust of sima like cakes of ice in a river, and, like ice, extending down into the medium in which they float much farther (10 to 60 miles) than they stick up out of it.

Therefore when geologists find sial or "continental" rocks under water or on an island, they suspect that these may mark the site of a former large land area. On the other hand they think that islands made entirely of volcanic sima, like the islands of Polynesia, must have grown up from the sea-bottom by volcanic action and are not the remains of any continent.

Now, the ocean bottom consists partly of shallow continental shelves, which are merely the submerged edges of the continents; vast submarine plains miles deep; and areas of moderate depth with a broken, mountainous relief.

By studying the speed of earthquake vibrations, geologists have learned that the great deeps are plain sima, while the continental shelves are mostly sial, and the submerged mountain-ranges partly sial. The greatest areas of deep sima are in the Central Pacific, the southern Indian, and the Arctic Oceans. These are therefore the "permanent" oceans, where no continents are to be expected, past, present, or future —despite the Central Pacific continents ("Mu," "Pan," etc.) imagined by members of the Atlantist cult.

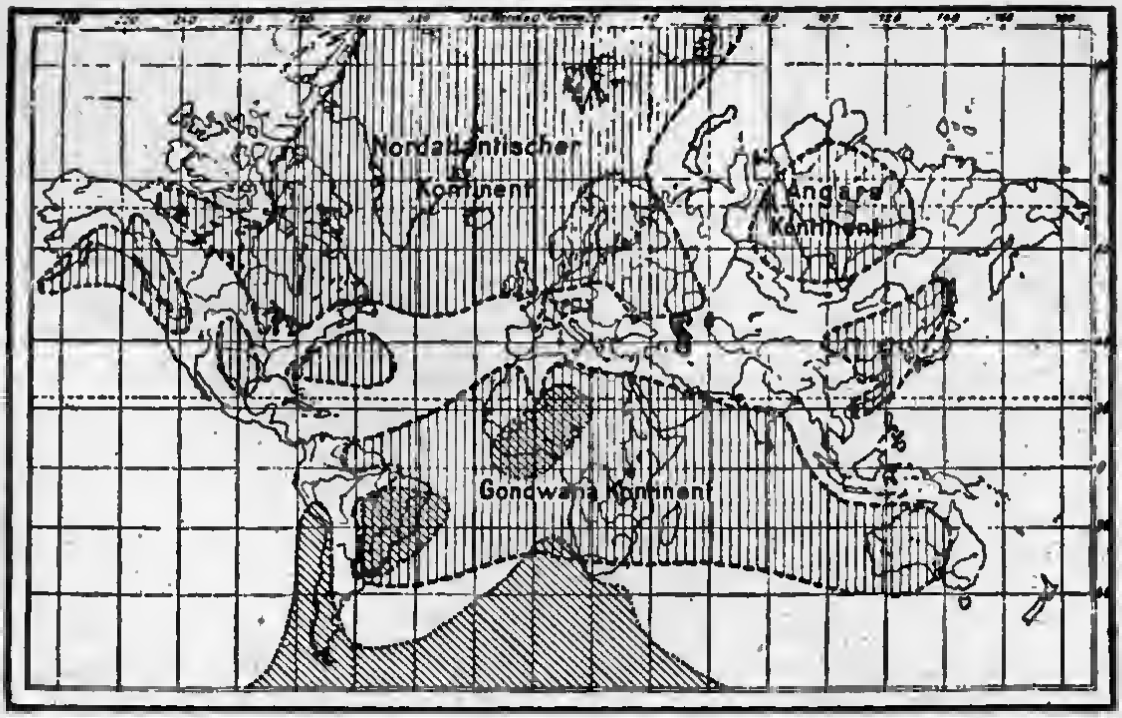
The great submarine mountain ranges, where we might reasonably expect a lost continent, lie in the Southwest Pacific (including the Fijis and New Zealand) and the Northwest Indian Oceans. The Atlantic Ocean seems to be sima with little patches of sial here and there, as in the Canaries and Madeira Islands, the last probably representing a peninsula that once extended out northwest from Africa.

MODERN geologists fall into three schools: the stable-continent school, the transoceanic-continent school, and the continental-drift school.

The stable-continent geologists like Matthew believe in no sunken continents, only slight movements of existing lands to open and close land bridges. The transoceanic-continent school believes big former continents possible, while the continental-drift school holds that the continents are stable in size and shape, but that they drift about the surface of the earth.

The transoceanic-continent school began in the 1860s, when some British geologists noted striking resemblances between certain formations in India and South Africa. Blanford pointed out the likeness between the rocks and fossils of a deposit of the Permian Period in Central India, in a tract called *Gondwana,* and a corresponding deposit in South Africa. Gondwana, "Land of the Gonds," is named for an East Indian tribe.

Blanford and his colleagues inferred that South Africa and India had once been connected by a land-bridge that included Madagascar, the Seychelles Reefs, and the Maldive and Laccadive Islands. These observations came to the notice of the Austrian paleontologist Neumayr and the German biologist Haeckel. Neu-



2. The Gondwanaland Theory: Suess's idea of the appearance of the world in the late Paleozoic Era includes a gigantic continent, now submerged

mayr in 1887 published the first attempt at a paleogeographical map of the world, showing how he thought it looked in Jurassic time, in the middle of the Age of Reptiles. (See Fig. 1.) It included a great "Brazilian-Ethiopian Continent" from whose southeast corner extended an "Indo-Madagascan Peninsula" corresponding to Blanford's Permian land-bridge.

Haeckel went further, using the Indo-Madagascan land-bridge to explain the distribution of lemurs, those primitive primates found in Africa, Madagascar, India, and the Malay Archipelago. More than that, he speculated that it has lasted well into the Cenozoic Era (Age of Mammals) and had been the original home of man. The English zoölogist Sclater suggested the name *Lemuria* for this bridge, after the animals that supposedly used it.

In the 1880s another Austrian geologist, Edward Suess, brought out an immense five-volume treatise on the geology of the world, in which he expressed the opinion that in the Paleozoic Era, the age of fishes and invertebrates and coal, there had been one large continent in the Southern Hemisphere, which he called "Gondwanaland" after Blanford's tract in India. He thought there had also been two northern continents: one, "Atlantis," essentially North America with a peninsula reaching over to Europe via Iceland; the other, eastern Asia,

which he named "Angara-land" after a Siberian river. (See Fig. 2.)

During the Jurassic and Cretaceous periods, when dinosaurs ruled the world, according to the Neumayr-Suess school, Gondwanaland gradually "broke up" by the sinking of its various parts. Australia and New Zealand separated first, which fact accounts for their lack of native placental mammals, since placental mammals had not been invented at the time of the separation. South America went next, and the last part to sink was the land-bridge from South Africa to India—the geologists' Lemuria, not to be confused with the Pacific "Lemuria" of the occultists and Atlantists, for which there is no geological evidence.

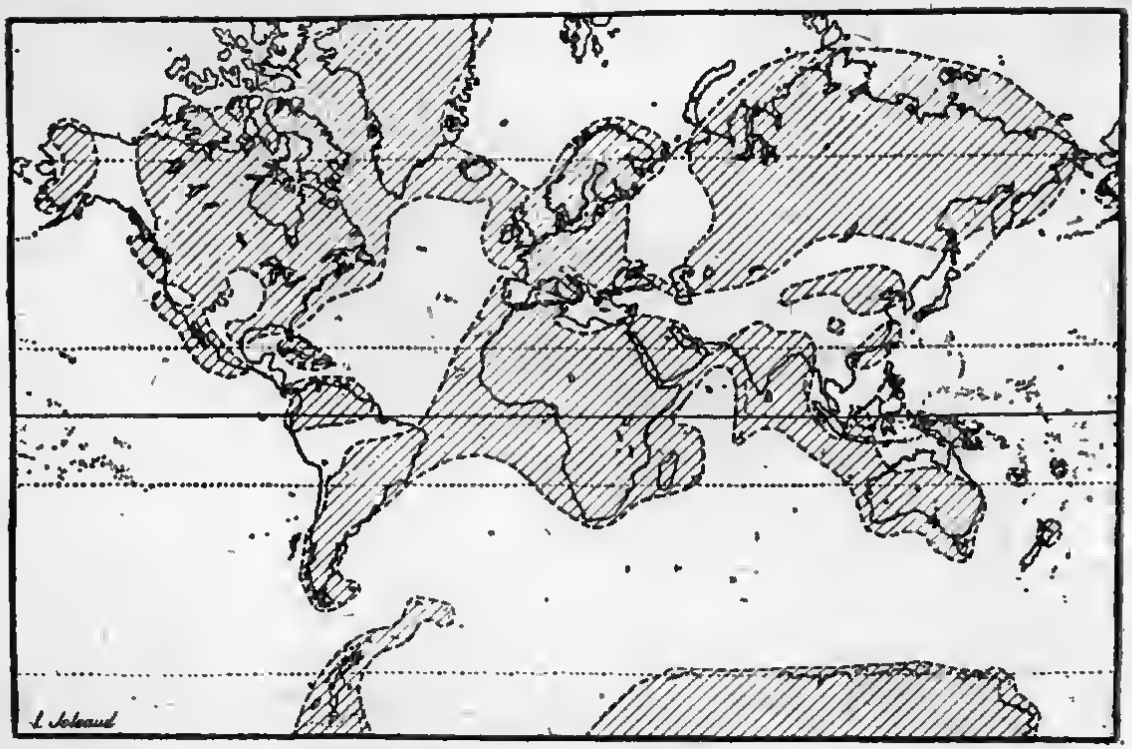
Many American geologists take a position between the stable-continent and transoceanic-continent schools. On one hand, they think there may be something to the evidence for direct migrations between the southern continents during and before the Age of Reptiles. On the other, they object to Suess's vast Gondwanaland because it would have displaced enough water to submerge the other continents completely, which never happened. American geologists therefore tend to picture the connections between the southern continents as "isthmian links"—narrow necks of land like the Isthmus of Panama rather than broad ocean-filling continental links. (See Fig. 3.)

Schuchert, for instance, thinks that back in Paleozoic times the connections among the continental masses tended to run east-west instead of north-south. During times of mountain-building, when the land stood high above the sea, the northern masses were joined in a single "Holarctica" encircling the North Pole and the southern masses were joined in a single Gondwanaland.

But this only happened at long intervals. The earth, you see, alternates between states of mountain-building and resting. During times of mountain-building ("orogeny," rhyming with "progeny") the continents are large and high, climates are cold and dry, and land-bridges are open to pedestrians, whereas in the resting periods the continents are low, flat, and small, land-bridges are submerged, and the free flow of ocean currents gives the world a warm, mild, moist climate. These up-and-down movements of the continents involve smaller up-and-down movements, during which the inland or "epeiric" seas advance and retreat.

THROUGHOUT periods of sinking, great rifts open in the earth's crust, from which lava wells out over tens of thousands of miles.

At last the downward motion is reversed. Parts of the continents bulge up, as if pushed together from the edges, and the continents rise; the epeiric seas drain away; erosion cuts the high parts of the lands into rugged mountain ranges; volcanoes erupt; the climate cools, dries, and becomes more extreme. There may



3. World map of the Pennsylvonion Period demonstrates how the present continents may have been connected by "isthmian links" or lond-bridges

be an ice age. Most geologists think we live at the end of a period of orogeny, and can look forward to many millions of years of sinking, shrinking, and warming of the lands we live on. It's a sobering thought that the human race may some day have to get along on half its present land.

GEOLOGISTS agree pretty well as to when and how cycles of mountain-building and subsidence happen, but not at all as to what makes them occur. The English geologist Joly, for instance, had a theory of orogenic cycles based on the accumulation of heat from the disintegration of radioactive materials in the earth's crust, but his theory has flaws in it, and so do most of the others. In another fifty years or so, the true explanation will no doubt come to light, an explanation that will perhaps combine features of several of the older theories.

That leaves the continental-drift hypothesis of Alfred Wegener, a professor of geophysics and meteorology at the University of Graz, Austria, who perished exploring the Greenland ice-cap in 1930. He said: If the continents *float* in the sima crust like cakes of ice in water, why can't they *drift* like cakes of ice? He therefore assumed a single supercontinent back in the Paleozoic Era, a "Pangaea" that included all the

modern continents. If Pangaea ever existed, it must, like the larger Gondwanaland of Suess and his school, have been a land of immense deserts, as the winds would sweep over it for thousands of miles after they had lost their moisture without being able to pick up any more.

Wegener's maps show clearly how all the continents can, with not too much coastal stretching, be fitted together like pieces of a jigsaw puzzle. Pangaea, according to Wegener, began to come unglued in the Mesozoic Era, the Dinosaur Age, and its parts drifted asunder until, in the Pleistocene Period, Europe came adrift from North America. Obviously we need not suppose the existence of land-bridges connecting the continents if they were once all huddled together, touching.

But the Wegener theory, however ingenious, has fatal flaws: Paleontologists object that the distribution of animals proves that Europe and North America were separated for good at least as early as the Mesozoic Era; the geophysicist Lambert calculated that the forces Wegener relied upon to tow his continents around the world were only one-millionth the size required. And how could continents, made of light and comparatively weak sial, plow their way through the denser and stronger sima in which they rest?

So much for Gondwanaland, Pangaea, and other geological lost continents. All are much a matter of educated guesswork, and the time has evidently not come when we can confidently draw the map of the earth as it looked on January first, 100,000,000 B. C.

WIDELY as the geologists differ among themselves, however they agree about some things:

—That there *may* have been lost continents in the Paleozoic Era, 200,000,000 B. C., when the highest life consisted of lizard-like reptiles.

—That these "continents" were probably not real continents, but narrow isthmuses connecting some of the present land masses, as the Panama Isthmus does now.

—That these continents, if they existed, lost their shape during the Mesozoic Era, so that by the beginning of the Cenozoic the map looked fairly modern.

—That these changes took place so long ago and so gradually that none of these "continents" could possibly have lasted to within millions of years of the time of man.

They agree, moreover, that there is not a grain of truth in the stories of Plato and his modern admirers, the occultists and the Atlantomaniacs, about continents that supported brilliant civilizations and then disappeared beneath the waves in the course of a day and a night of storm and earthquake.

It's sad, perhaps, to give up such pretty and alluring legends, but science has no room for sentimentality and superstition.

—L. SPRAGUE de CAMP

TRANSFER POINT

BY ANTHONY BOUCHER

It was a nasty plot Vyrko was involved in. The worst part was that he constructed it himself—and didn't get the end right!

THERE were three of them in the retreat, three out of all mankind safe from the deadly yellow bands.

The great Kirth-Labbery himself had constructed the retreat and its extraordinary air-conditioning—not because his scientific genius had foreseen the coming of the poisonous element, agnoton, and the end of the human race, but because he itched.

And here Vyrko sat, methodically recording the destruction of mankind, once in a straight factual record, for the instruction of future readers ("if any," he added wryly to himself), and again as a canto in that epic poem of Man which he never expected to complete, but for which he lived.

Lavra's long golden hair fell over his shoulders. It was odd that its scent distracted him when he was at work on the factual record, yet seemed to wing the lines of the epic.

"But why bother?" she asked. Her speech might have been clearer if her tongue had not been more preoccupied with the savor of the apple than with the articulation of words. But Vyrko understood readily: the remark was as familiar an opening as P-K4 in chess.

"It's my duty," Vyrko explained patiently. "I haven't your father's scientific knowledge and perception. Your father's? I haven't the knowledge of his humblest lab assistant. But I can put words together so that they make sense and sometimes more than sense, and I have to do this."

From Lavra's plump red lips an apple pip fell into the works of the electronic typewriter. Vyrko fished it out automatically; this too was part of the gambit, with the possible variants of grape seed, orange peel. . . .

"But why," Lavra demanded petulantly, "won't Father let us leave here? A girl might as well be in a . . . a . . ."

"Convent?" Vyrko suggested. He was a good amateur paleolinguist. "There is an analogy—even despite my presence. *Convents* were supposed to shelter girls from the Perils of The World. Now the whole world is one great Peril . . . outside of this retreat."

"Go on," Lavra urged. She had

Illustrated by Paul Piérre

long ago learned, Vyrko suspected, that he was a faintly over-serious young man with no small talk, and that she could enjoy his full attention only by asking to have something explained, even if for the *n*th time.

HE SMILED and thought of the girls he used to talk *with*, not *at*, and of how little breath they had for talking now in the world where no one drew an unobstructed breath.

It had begun with the accidental discovery in a routine laboratory analysis of a new element in the air, an inert gas which the great paleolinguist Larkish had named *agnoton*, the Unknown Thing, after the pattern of the similar nicknames given to others: *neon*, the New Thing; *xenon*, the Strange Thing.

It had continued (the explanation ran off so automatically that his mind was free to range from the next line of the epic to the interesting question of whether the presence of ear lobes would damage the symmetry of Lavra's perfect face) it had continued with the itching and sneezing, the coughing and wheezing, with the increase of the percentage of agnoton in the atmosphere, promptly passing any other inert gas, even argon, and soon rivaling oxygen itself.

And it had culminated (no, the lines were cleaner without lobes), on that day when only the three of them were here in this retreat, with the discovery that the human race was allergic to agnoton.

Allergies had been conquered for a decade of generations. Their cure, even their palliation, had been forgotten. And mankind coughed and sneezed and itched . . . and died. For while the allergies of the ancient past produced only agonies to make the patient long for death, agnoton brought on racking and incessant spasms of coughing and sneezing which no heart could long withstand.

"So if you leave this shelter, my dear," Vyrko concluded, "you too will fight for every breath and twist your body in torment until your heart decides that it is all just too much trouble. Here we are safe, because your father's eczema was the only known case of allergy in centuries—and was traced to the inert gases. Here is the only air-conditioning in the world that excludes the inert gases—and with them agnoton. And here—"

LAVRA leaned forward, a smile and a red fleck of apple skin on her lips, the apples of her breasts touching Vyrko's shoulders. This too was part of the gambit.

Usually it was merely declined. (Tyrsa stood between them. Tyrsa, who sang well and talked better; whose plain face and beautiful throat were alike racked by agonton . . .) This time the gambit was interrupted.

Kirth-Labbery himself had come in unnoticed. His old voice was thin with weariness, sharp with impatience. "And here we are, safe in

perpetuity, with our air-conditioning, our energy plant, our hydroponics! Safe in perpetual siege, besieged by an inert gas!"

Vyrko grinned. "Undignified, isn't it?"

Kirth-Labbery managed to laugh at himself. "Damn your secretarial hide, Vyrko. I love you like a son, but if I had one man who knew a meson from a metazoon to help me in the laboratory. . . ."

"You'll find something, Father," Lavra said vaguely.

Her father regarded her with an odd seriousness. "Lavra," he said, "your beauty is the greatest thing that I have wrought—with a certain assistance, I'll grant, from the genes so obviously carried by your mother. That beauty alone still has meaning. The sight of you would bring a momentary happiness even to a man choking in his last spasms, while our great web of civilization. . . ."

He absently left the sentence unfinished and switched on the video screen. He had to try a dozen channels before he found one that was still casting. When every erg of a man's energy goes to drawing his next breath, he cannot tend his machine.

At last Kirth-Labbery picked up a Nyork newscast. The announcer was sneezing badly ("The older literature," Vyrko observed, "found sneezing comic . . ."), but still contriving to speak, and somewhere a group of technicians must have had partial control of themselves.

"Four hundred and seventy-two planes have crashed," the announcer said, "in the past forty-eight hours. Civil authorities have forbidden further plane travel indefinitely because of the danger of spasms at the controls, and it is rumored that all vehicular transport whatsoever is to come under the same ban. No Rocklipper has arrived from Lunn for over a week, and it is thirty-six hours since we have made contact with the Lunn telestation. Yurp has been silent for over two days, and Asia a week.

" 'The most serious threat of this epidemic,' the head of the Academy has said in an authorized statement, 'is the complete disruption of the systems of communication upon which world civilization is based. When man becomes physically incapable of governing his machines . . .' "

IT WAS then that they saw the first of the yellow bands.

It was just that: a band of bright yellow some thirty centimeters wide, about five meters long, and so thin as to seem insubstantial, a mere stripe of color. It came underneath the backdrop behind the announcer. It streaked about the casting room with questing sinuosity. No features, no appendages relieved its yellow blankness.

Then with a deft whipping motion it wrapped itself around the announcer. It held him only an instant. His hideously shriveled body plunged toward the camera as the screen went dead.

That was the start of the horror.

Vyrko, naturally, had no idea of the origin of the yellow bands. Even Kirth-Labbery could offer no more than conjectures. From another planet, another system, another galaxy, another universe. . . .

It did not matter. Precise knowledge had now lost its importance. Kirth-Labbery was almost as indifferent to the problem as was Lavra; he speculated on it out of sheer habit. What signified was that the yellow bands were alien, and that they were rapidly and precisely completing the destruction of mankind begun by the agnoton.

"Their arrival immediately after the epidemic," Kirth-Labbery concluded, "cannot be coincidence. You will observe that they function freely in an agnoton-laden atmosphere."

"It would be interesting," Vyrko commented, "to visualize a band sneezing. . . ."

"It's possible," the scientist corrected, "that the agnoton was a poison-gas barrage laid down to soften Earth for their coming; but is it likely that they could *know* that a gas harmless to them would be lethal to other life? It's more probable that they learned from spectroscopic analysis that the atmosphere of Earth lacked an element essential to them, which they supplied before invading."

Vyrko considered the problem while Lavra sliced a peach with delicate grace. She was unable to resist licking the juice from her fingers.

"Then if the agnoton," he ventured, "is something that they imported, is it possible that their supply might run short?"

Kirth-Labbery fiddled with the dials under the screen. It was still possible to pick up occasional glimpses from remote sectors, though by now the heart sickened in advance at the knowledge of the inevitable end of the cast.

"It is possible, Vyrko. It is the only hope. The three of us here, where the agnoton and the yellow bands are alike helpless to enter, may continue our self-sufficient existence long enough to outlast the invaders. Perhaps somewhere on Earth there are other such nuclei, but I doubt it. We are the whole of the future . . . and I am old."

VYRKO frowned. He resented the terrible weight of a burden that he did not want but could not reject. He felt himself at once oppressed and ennobled. Lavra went on eating her peach.

The video screen sprang into light. A young man with the tense, lined face of premature age spoke hastily, urgently. "To all of you, if there are any of you . . . I have heard no answer for two days now . . . It is chance that I am here. But *watch,* all of you! I have found how the yellow bands came here. I am going to turn the camera on it now . . . *watch!*"

The field of vision panned to something that was for a moment

totally incomprehensible. "This is their ship," the old young man gasped. It was a set of bars of a metal almost exactly the color of the bands themselves, and it appeared in the first instant like a three-dimensional projection of a tesseract. Then as they looked at it, their eyes seemed to follow strange new angles. Possibilities of vision opened up beyond their capacities. For a moment they seemed to see what the human eye was not framed to grasp.

"They come," the voice panted on, "from . . ."

The voice and the screen went dead. Vyrko covered his eyes with his hands. Darkness was infinite relief. A minute passed before he felt that he could endure once more even the normal exercise of the optic nerve. He opened his eyes sharply at a little scream from Lavra.

He opened them to see how still Kirth-Labbery sat. The human heart, too, is framed to endure only so much; and, as the scientist had said, he was old.

IT WAS three days after Kirth-Labbery's death before Vyrko had brought his prose-and-verse record up to date. Nothing more had appeared on the video, even after the most patient hours of knob-twirling. Now Vyrko leaned back from the keyboard and contemplated his completed record—and then sat forward with abrupt shock at the thought of that word *completed*.

There was nothing more to write.

The situation was not novel in literature. He had read many treatments, and even written a rather successful satire on the theme himself. But here was the truth itself.

He was that most imagination-stirring of all figures, The Last Man on Earth. And he found it a boring situation.

Kirth-Labbery, had he lived, would have devoted his energies in the laboratory to an effort, even conceivably a successful one, to destroy the invaders. Vyrko knew his own limitations too well to attempt that.

Vrist, his gay wild twin, who had been in Lunn on yet another of his fantastic ventures when the agnoton struck—Vrist would have dreamed up some gallant feat of physical prowess to make the invaders pay dearly for his life. Vyrko found it difficult to cast himself in so swashbuckling a role.

He had never envied Vrist till now. *Be jealous of the dead; only the living are alone.* Vyrko smiled as he recalled the line from one of his early poems. It had been only the expression of a pose when he wrote it, a mood for a song that Tyrsa would sing well . . .

It was in this mood that he found (the ancient word had no modern counterpart) the *pulps*.

HE KNEW their history: how some eccentric of two thousand years ago (the name was variously rendered as Trees or Tiller) had buried them in a hermetic capsule to

check against the future; how Tarabal had dug them up some fifty years ago; how Kirth-Labbery had spent almost the entire Hartl Prize for them because, as he used to assert, their incredible mixture of exact prophecy and arrant nonsense offered the perfect proof of the greatness and helplessness of human ingenuity.

But Vyrko had never read them before. They would at least be a novelty to deaden the boredom of his classically dramatic situation. He passed a more than pleasant hour with *Galaxy* and *Surprising* and the rest, needing the dictionary but rarely. He was particularly impressed by one story detailing, with the most precise minutiae, the politics of the American Religious Wars—a subject on which he himself had based a not unsuccessful novel. By one Norbert Holt, he observed. Extraordinary how exact a forecast . . . and yet extraordinary too how many of the stories dealt with space- and time-travel, which the race had never yet attained and now never would . . .

And inevitably there was a story, a neat and witty one by an author named Knight, about the Last Man on Earth. He read it and smiled, first at the story and then at his own stupidity.

He found Lavra in the laboratory, of all unexpected places.

She was staring fixedly at one corner, where the light did not strike clearly.

"What's so fascinating?" Vyrko asked.

Lavra turned suddenly. Her hair and her flesh rippled with the perfect grace of the movement. "I was thinking . . ."

Vyrko's half-formed intent toward her permitted no comment on that improbable statement.

"The day before Father . . . died, I was in here with him and I asked if there was any hope of our escaping ever. Only this time he answered me. He said yes, there was a way out, but he was afraid of it. It was an idea he'd worked on but never tried. And we'd be wiser not to try it, he said."

"I don't believe in arguing with your father—even post mortem."

"But I can't help wondering . . . And when he said it, he looked over at that corner."

VYRKO went to that corner and drew back a curtain. There was a chair of metal rods, and a crude control panel, though it was hard to see what it was intended to control. He dropped the curtain.

For a moment he stood watching Lavra. She was a fool, but she was exceedingly lovely. And the child of Kirth-Labbery could hardly carry only a fool's genes.

Several generations could grow up in this retreat before the inevitable failure of the most permanent mechanical installations made it uninhabitable. By that time Earth would be free of agnoton and yellow bands, or they would be so firmly established that there was no hope. The third

generation would go forth into the world, to perish or . . .

He walked over to Lavra and laid a gentle hand on her golden hair.

VYRKO never understood whether Lavra had been bored before that time. A life of undemanding inaction with plenty of food may well have sufficed her. Certainly she was not bored now.

At first she was merely passive; Vyrko had always suspected that she had meant the gambit to be declined. Then as her interest mounted and Vyrko began to compliment himself on his ability as an instructor, they became certain of their success; and from that point on she was rapt with the fascination of the changes in herself.

But even this new development did not totally rid Vyrko of his own ennui. If there were only something he could *do,* some positive, Vristian, Kirth-Labberian step that he could take! He damned himself for having been an incompetent esthetic fool, who had taken so for granted the scientific wonders of his age that he had never learned what made them tick, or how greater wonders might be attained.

He slept too much, he ate too much, for a brief period he drank too much—until he found boredom even less attractive with a hangover.

He tried to write, but the terrible uncertainty of any future audience disheartened him.

Sometimes a week would pass without his consciously thinking of agnoton or the yellow bands. Then he would spend a day flogging himself into a state of nervous tension worthy of his uniquely dramatic situation, but he would always relapse. There just wasn't anything to do.

Now even the consolation of Lavra's beauty was vanishing, and she began demanding odd items of food which the hydroponic garden could not supply.

"If you loved me, you'd find a way to make cheese . . ." or " . . . grow a new kind of peach . . . a little like a grape, only different . . ."

It was while he was listening to a film wire of Tyrsa's (the last she ever made, in the curious tonalities of that newly rediscovered Mozart opera) and seeing her homely face, made even less lovely by the effort of those effortless-sounding notes, that he became conscious of the operative phrase.

"If you loved me . . ."

"Have I ever said I did?" he snapped.

He saw a new and not readily understood expression mar the beauty of Lavra's face. "No," she said in sudden surprise. "No," and her voice fell to flatness, "you haven't . . ."

And as her sobs—the first he had ever heard from her—traveled away toward the hydroponic room, he felt a new and not readily understood emotion. He switched off the film wire midway through the pyrotechnic rage of the eighteenth-century queen of darkness.

VYRKO found a curious refuge in the *pulps*. There was a perverse satisfaction in reading the thrilling exploits of other Last Men on Earth. He could feel through them the emotions that he should be feeling directly. And the other stories were fun, too, in varying ways. For instance, that astonishingly accurate account of the delicate maneuvering which averted what threatened to be the first and final Atomic War . . .

He noticed one oddity: Every absolutely correct story of the "future" bore the same by-line. Occasionally other writers made good guesses, predicted logical trends, foresaw inevitable extrapolations. But only Norbert Holt named names and dated dates with perfect historical accuracy.

It wasn't possible. It was too precise to be plausible. It was far more spectacular than the erratic Nostradamus often discussed in the *pulps*.

But there it was. He had read the Holt stories solidly through in order a half-dozen times, without finding a single flaw, when he discovered the copy of *Surprising Stories* that had slipped behind a shelf and was therefore new to him.

He looked at once at the contents page. Yes, there was a Holt and—he felt a twinge of irrational but poignant sadness—one labeled as posthumous.

> This story, we regret to tell you, is incomplete, and not only because of Norbert Holt's tragic death last month. This is the last in chronological order of Holt's stories of a consistently plotted future; but this fragment was written before his masterpiece, *The Siege of Lunn*. Holt himself used to tell me that he could never finish it, that he could not find an ending; and he died still not knowing how *The Last Boredom* came out. But here, even though in fragment form, is the last published work of the greatest writer about the future, Norbert Holt.

The note was signed with the initials M. S. Vyrko had long sensed a more than professional intimacy between Holt and his editor, Manning Stern; this obituary introduction must have been a bitter task. But his eyes were hurrying on, almost fearfully, to the first words of *The Lost Boredom:*

> There were three of them in the retreat, three out of all mankind safe from the deadly yellow bands. The great Kirth-Labbery himself had constructed . . .

Vryko blinked and started again. It still read the same. He took firm hold of the magazine, as though the miracle might slip between his fingers, and dashed off with more energy than he had felt in months.

HE FOUND Lavra in the hydroponic room. "I have just found," he shouted, "the damnedest unbelievable—"

"Darling," said Lavra, "I want some meat."

"Don't be silly. We haven't any meat. Nobody's eaten meat except at ritual dinners for generations."

"Then I want a ritual dinner."

"You can go on wanting. But look at this! Just read those first lines!"

"Vyrko," she pleaded, "I *want* it."

"Don't be an idiot!"

Her lips pouted and her eyes moistened. "Vyrko dear . . . What you said when you were listening to that funny music . . . Don't you love me?"

"No," he barked.

Her eyes overflowed. "You don't love me? Not after . . .?"

All Vyrko's pent-up boredom and irritation erupted. "You're beautiful, Lavra, or you were a few months ago, but you're an idiot. I am not in the habit of loving idiots."

"But you . . ."

"I tried to assure the perpetuation of the race—questionable though the desirability of such a project seems at the moment. It was not an unpleasant task, but I'm damned if it gives you the right in perpetuity to pester me."

She moaned a little as he slammed out of the room. He felt oddly better. Adrenalin is a fine thing for the system. He settled into a chair and resolutely read, his eyes bugging like a cover-monster's with amazed disbelief. When he reached the verbatim account of the quarrel he had just enjoyed, he dropped the magazine.

It sounded so petty in print. Such stupid inane bickering in the face of . . . He left the magazine lying there and went back to the hydroponic room.

Lavra was crying—noiselessly this time, which somehow made it worse. One hand had automatically plucked a ripe grape, but she was not eating it. He went up behind her and slipped his hand under her long hair and began stroking the nape of her neck. The soundless sobs diminished gradually. When his fingers moved tenderly behind her ears, she turned to him with parted lips. The grape fell from her hand.

"I'm sorry," he heard himself saying. "It's me that's the idiot. Which, I repeat, I am not in the habit of loving. And you're the mother of my twins and I do love you . . ." And he realized that the statement was quite possibly, if absurdly, true.

"I don't want anything now," Lavra said when words were again in order. She stretched contentedly, and she was still beautiful even in the ungainly distortion which might preserve a race. "Now what were you trying to tell me?"

HE EXPLAINED. "And this Holt is always right," he ended. "And now he's writing about us!"

"Oh! Oh, then we'll know—"

"We'll know everything. We'll know what the yellow bands are and what becomes of them and what happens to mankind and—"

"—and we'll know," said Lavra, "whether it's a boy or a girl."

Vyrko smiled. "Twins, I told you. It runs in my family—no less than one pair to a generation. And I think that's it—Holt's already planted the fact of my having a twin named Vrist, even though he doesn't come into the action."

"Twins . . . That *would* be nice. They wouldn't be lonely until we could . . . But get it quick, dear. Read it to me; I can't wait!"

So he read Norbert Holt's story to her—too excited and too oddly affectionate to point out that her long-standing aversion for print persisted even when she herself was a character. He read on past the quarrel. He read a printable version of the past hour. He read about himself reading the story to her.

"Now!" she cried. "We're up to *now*. What happens next?"

Vyrko read:

> The emotional release of anger and love had set Vyrko almost at peace with himself again; but a small restlessness still nibbled at his brain.
>
> Irrelevantly he remembered Kirth-Labbery's cryptic hint of escape. Escape for the two of them, happy now; for the two of them and for their . . . it had to be, according to the odds, their twins.
>
> He sauntered curiously into the laboratory, Lavra following him. He drew back the curtain and stared at the chair of metal rods. It was hard to see the control board that seemed to control nothing. He sat in the chair for a better look.
>
> He made puzzled grunting noises. Lavra, her curiosity finally stirred by something inedible, reached over his shoulder and poked at the green button.

"I DON'T like that last thing he says about me," Lavra objected. "I don't like anything he says about me. I think your Mr. Holt is a very nasty person."

"He says you're beautiful."

"And he says you love me. Or does he? It's all mixed up."

"It is all mixed up . . . and I do love you."

The kiss was a short one; Lavra had to say, "And what next?"

"That's all. It ends there."

"Well . . . Aren't you . . .?"

Vyrko felt strange. Holt had described his feelings so precisely. He was at peace and still curious, and the thought of Kirth-Labbery's escape method did nibble restlessly at his brain.

He rose and sauntered into the laboratory, Lavra following him. He drew back the curtain and stared at the chair of metal rods. It was hard to see the control board that seemed to control nothing. He sat in the chair for a better look.

He made puzzled grunting noises. Lavra, her curiosity finally stirred by something inedible, reached over his shoulder and poked at the green button.

VYRKO had no time for amazement when Lavra and the laboratory vanished. He saw the archaic vehicle bearing down directly upon him and tried to get out of the way as rapidly as possible. But the chair hampered him and before he could get to his feet the vehicle struck. There was a red explosion of pain and then a long blackness.

He later recalled a moment of consciousness at the hospital and a shrill female voice repeating over and over, "But he wasn't there and then all of a sudden he was and I hit him. It was like he came out of nowhere. He wasn't there and all of a sudden . . ." Then the blackness came back.

All the time of his unconsciousness, all through the semi-conscious nightmares while doctors probed at him and his fever soared, his unconscious mind must have been working on the problem. He knew the complete answer the instant that he saw the paper on his breakfast tray, that first day he was capable of truly seeing anything.

The paper was easy to read for a paleolinguist with special training in *pulps*—easier than the curious concept of breakfast was to assimilate. What mattered was the date. 1948—and the headlines refreshed his knowledge of the Cold War and the impending election. (There was something he should remember about that election. . . .)

He saw it clearly. Kirth-Labbery's genius had at last evolved a time machine. That was the one escape, the escape which the scientist had not yet tested and rather distrusted. And Lavra had poked the green button because Norbert Holt had said she had poked (would poke?) the green button.

How many buttons could a wood poke poke if a wood poke would poke . .

"The breakfast didn't seem to agree with him, doctor."

"Maybe it was the paper. Makes me run a temperature every morning, too!"

"Oh, doctor, you do say the funniest things!"

"Nothing funnier than this case. Total amnesia, as best we can judge by his lucid moments. And his clothes don't help us—must've been on his way to a fancy-dress party. Or maybe I should say fancy-*un*dress!"

"Oh, *doctor!*"

"Don't tell me nurses can blush. Never did when I was an intern—and you can't say they didn't get a chance! But this character here . . . not a blessed bit of identification on him! Riding some kind of new-fangled bike that got smashed up . . . Better hold off on the solid food for a bit—stick to intravenous feeding."

HE'D HAD this trouble before at ritual dinners, Vyrko finally recalled. Meat was apt to affect him badly—the trouble was that he had not at first recognized those odd strips of oily solid which accompanied the egg as meat.

The adjustment was gradual and

successful, in this as in other matters. At the end of two weeks, he was eating meat easily (and, he confessed, with a faintly obscene non-ritual pleasure) and equally easily chatting with nurses and fellow patients about the events (which he still privately tended to regard as mummified museum pieces) of 1948.

His adjustment, in fact, was soon so successful that it could not continue. The doctor made that clear.

"Got to think about the future, you know. Can't keep you here forever. Nasty unreasonable prejudice against keeping well men in hospitals."

Vyrko allowed the expected laugh to come forth. "But since," he said, gladly accepting the explanation that was so much more credible than the truth, "I haven't any idea who I am, where I live, or what my profession is—"

"Can't remember anything? Don't know if you can take shorthand, for instance? Or play the bull fiddle?"

"Not a thing." Vyrko felt it hardly worth while to point out his one manual accomplishment, the operation of the as-yet-uninvented electronic typewriter.

"Behold," he thought, "the Man of the Future. I've read all the time travel stories. I know what should happen. I teach them everything Kirth-Labbery knew and I'm the greatest man in the world. Only the fictional time travel never happens to a poor dope who took for granted all the science around him, who pushed a button or turned a knob and never gave a damn what happened or why. Here they're just beginning to get two-dimensional black-and-white short-range television. We had (will have?) stereoscopic full-color world-wide video—which I'm about as capable of constructing here as my friend the doctor would be of installing electric light in Ancient Rome. The Mouse of the Future . . ."

The doctor had been thinking, too. He said, "Notice you're a great reader. Librarian's been telling me about you—went through the whole damn hospital library like a bookworm with a tapeworm!"

Vyrko laughed dutifully. "I like to read," he admitted.

"Every try writing?" the doctor asked abrupty, almost in the tone in which he might reluctantly advise a girl that her logical future lay in Port Saïd.

This time Vyrko really laughed. "That does seem to ring a bell, you know . . . It might be worth trying. But at that, what do I live on until I get started?"

"Hospital trustees here administer a rehabilitation fund. Might wangle a loan. Won't be much, of course; but I always say a single man's got only one mouth to feed—and if he feeds more, he won't be single long!"

"A little," said Vyrko with a glance at the newspaper headlines, "might go a long way."

IT DID. There was the loan itself, which gave him a bank account on which, in turn, he could acquire

other short-term loans—at exorbitant interest. And there was the election.

He had finally reconstructed what he should know about it. There had been a brilliant Wheel-of-If story in one of the much later pulps, on *If* the Republicans had won the 1948 election. Which meant that actually they had lost; and here, in October of 1948, all newspapers, all commentators, and most important, all gamblers, were convinced that they must infallibly win.

On Wednesday, November third, Vyrko repaid his debts and settled down to his writing career, comfortably guaranteed against immediate starvation.

A half-dozen attempts at standard fiction failed wretchedly. A matter of "tone," editors remarked vaguely, on the rare occasions when they did not confine themselves to the even vaguer phrases of printed rejection forms. A little poetry sold—"if you can call that selling," Vyrko thought bitterly, comparing the financial position of the poet here and in his own world.

His failures were beginning to bring back the bitterness and boredom, and his thoughts turned more and more to that future to which he could never know the answer.

Twins. It had to be twins—of opposite sexes, of course. The only hope of the continuance of the race lay in a matter of odds and genetics.

Odds . . . . He began to think of the election bet, to figure other angles with which he could turn foreknowledge to profit. But his pulp-reading had filled his mind with fears of the paradoxes involved. He had calculated the election bets carefully; they could not affect the outcome of the election, they could not even, in their proportionately small size, affect the odds. But any further step . . .

Vyrko was, like most conceited men, fond of self-contempt, which he felt he could occasionally afford to indulge in. Possibly his strongest access of self-contempt came when he realized the simplicity of the solution to all his problems.

He could write for the science fiction pulps.

The one thing that he could handle convincingly and skilfully, with the proper "tone," was the future. Possibly start off with a story on the Religious Wars; he'd done all that research on his novel. Then . . .

It was not until he was about to mail the manuscript that the full pattern of the truth struck him.

Soberly, yet half-grinning, he crossed out KIRTH VYRKO on the first page and wrote NORBERT HOLT.

MANNING STERN rejoiced loudly in this fresh discovery. "This boy's got it! He makes it sound so real that . . ." The business office was instructed to pay the highest bonus rate (unheard of for a first story) and an intensely cordial letter went to the author outlining immediate needs and offering certain story suggestions.

The editor of *Surprising* was no little surprised at the answer:

> . . . I regret to say that all my stories will be based on one consistent scheme of future events and that you must allow me to stick to my own choice of material . . .

"AND who the hell," Manning Stern demanded, "is editing this magazine?" and dictated a somewhat peremptory suggestion for a personal interview.

The features were small and sharp, and the face had a sort of dark aliveness. It was a different beauty from Lavra's, and an infinitely different beauty from the curious standards set by the 1949 films; but it was beauty and it spoke to Norbert Holt.

"You'll forgive a certain surprise, Miss Stern," he ventured. "I've read *Surprising* for so many years and never thought . . ."

Manning Stern grinned. "That the editor was also surprising? I'm used to it—your reaction, I mean. I don't think I'll ever be quite used to being a woman . . . or a human being, for that matter."

"Isn't it rather unusual? From what I know of the field . . ."

"Please God, when I find a man who can write, don't let him go all male-chauvinist on me! I'm a good editor, said she with becoming modesty (and don't you ever forget it!) and I'm a good scientist. I even worked on the Manhattan Project—until some character discovered that my adopted daughter was a Spanish War orphan. But what we're here to talk about is this consistent-scheme gimmick of yours. It's all right, of course; it's been done before. But where I frankly think you're crazy is in planning to do it *exclusively*."

Norbert Holt opened his briefcase. "I've brought along an outline that might help convince you . . ."

An hour later Manning Stern glanced at her watch and announced; "End of office hours! Care to continue this slugfest over a martini or five? I warn you—the more I'm plied, the less pliant I get."

And an hour after that she stated, "We might get some place if we'd stay some place. I mean the subject seems to be getting elusive."

"The hell," Norbert Holt announced recklessly, "with editorial relations. Let's get back to the current state of the opera."

"It was paintings. I was telling you about the show at the—"

"No, I remember now. It was movies. You were trying to explain the Marx Brothers. Unsuccessfully, I may add."

"Un . . . suc . . . cess . . . fully," said Manning Stern ruminatively. "Five martinis and the man can say unsuccessfully successfully. But I try to explain the Marx Brothers yet! Look, Holt. I've got a subversive orphan at home and she's undoubtedly starving. I've *got* to feed her. You come home and meet her and have potluck, huh?"

"Good. Fine. Always like to try a new dish."

Manning Stern looked at him curiously. "Now was that a gag or not? You're funny, Holt. You know a lot about everything and then all of a sudden you go all Man-from-Mars on the simplest thing. Or do you? . . . Anyway, let's go feed Raquel."

And five hours later Holt was saying, "I never thought I'd have this reason for being glad I sold a story. Manning, I haven't had so much fun talking to—I almost said 'to a woman,' I haven't had so much fun talking since—"

He had almost said *since the agnoton came*. She seemed not to notice his abrupt halt. She simply said, "Bless you, Norb. Maybe you aren't a male-chauvinist. Maybe even you're . . . Look, go find a subway or a cab or something. If you stay here another minute, I'm either going to kiss you or admit you're right about your stories—and I don't know which is worse editor-author relations."

MANNING STERN committed the second breach of relations first. The fan mail on Norbert Holt's debut left her no doubt that *Surprising* would profit by anything he chose to write about.

She'd never seen such a phenomenally rapid rise in author popularity. Or rather you could hardly say *rise*. Holt hit the top with his first story and stayed there. He socked the fen (Guest of Honor at the Washinvention), the pros (first President of Science Fiction Writers of America), and the general reader (author of the first pulp-bred science fiction book to stay three months on the best seller list).

And never had there been an author who was more pure damned fun to work with. Not that you edited him; you checked his copy for typos and sent it to the printers. (Typos were frequent at first; he said something odd about absurd illogical keyboard arrangement.) But just being with him, talking about this, that and those . . . Raquel, just turning sixteen, was quite obviously in love with him—praying that he'd have the decency to stay single till she grew up and "You know, Manningcita, I *am* Spanish; and the Mediterranean girls . . ."

But there *was* this occasional feeling of *oddness*. Like the potluck and the illogical keyboard and that night at SCWA . . .

"I've got a story problem," Norbert Holt announced there. "An idea, and I can't lick it. Maybe if I toss it out to the literary lions . . ."

"Story problem?" Manning said, a little more sharply than she'd intended. "I thought everything was outlined for the next ten years."

"This is different. This is a sort of parodox story, and I can't get out of it. It won't end. Somthing like this: Suppose a man in the remote year X reads a story that tells him how to work a time machine. So he works the time machine and goes back to

the year X minus 2000—let's say, for instance, our time. So in 'now' he writes the story that he's going to read two thousand years later, telling himself how to work the time machine because he knows how to work it because he read the story which he wrote because—"

Manning was starting to say "Hold it!" when Matt Duncan interrupted with, "Good old endless-cycle gimmick. Lot of fun to kick around, but Bob Heinlein did it once and for all in *By His Bootstraps*. Damnedest tour de force I ever read; there just aren't any switcheroos left."

"Ouroboros," Joe Henderson contributed.

Norbert Holt looked a vain question at him; they knew that one word per evening was Joe's maximum contribution.

Austin Carter picked it up. "Ouroboros, the worm that circles the universe with its tail in its mouth. The Asgard Serpent, too. And I think there's something in Mayan literature. All symbols of infinity—no beginning, no ending. Always out by the same door where you went in. See that magnificent novel of Eddison's, *The Worm Ouroboros;* the perfect cyclic novel, ending with its recommencement, stopping not because there's a stopping place, but because it's uneconomical to print the whole text over infinitely."

"The Quaker Oats box," said Duncan. "With a Quaker holding a box with a Quaker holding a box with a Quaker holding a . . ."

It was standard professional shoptalk. It was a fine evening with the boys. But there was a look of infinitely remote sadness in Norbert Holt's eyes.

That was the evening that Manning violated her first rule of editor-author relationships.

THEY were having martinis in the same bar in which Norbert had, so many years ago, successfully said *unsuccessfully*.

"They've been good years," he remarked, apparently to the olive.

There was something wrong with this evening. No bounce. No yumph. "That's a funny tense," Manning confided to her own olive. "Aren't they still good years?"

"I've owed you a serious talk for a long time."

"You don't have to pay the debt. We don't go in much for being serious, do we? Not so dead-earnest-catch-in-the-throat serious."

"Don't we?"

"I've got an awful feeling," Manning admitted, "that you're building up to a proposal, either to me or that olive. And if it's me, I've got an awful feeling I'm going to accept—and Raquel will *never* forgive me."

"You're safe," Norbert said dryly. "That's the serious talk. I want to marry you, darling, and I'm not going to."

"I suppose this is the time you twirl your black mustache and tell me you have a wife and family elsewhere?"

"I hope to God I have!"

"No, it wasn't very funny, was it?" Manning felt very little, aside from wishing she were dead.

"I can't tell you the truth," he went on. "You wouldn't believe it. I've loved two women before; one had talent and a brain, the other had beauty and no brain. I think I loved her. The damnedest curse of Ouroboros is that I'll never quite know. If I could take that tail out of that mouth . . ."

"Go on," she encouraged a little wildly. "Talk plot-gimmicks. It's easier on me."

"And she is carrying . . . will carry . . . my child—my children, it must be. My twins . . ."

"Look, Holt. We came in here editor and author—remember back when? Let's go out that way. Don't go on talking. I'm a big girl, but I can't take . . . everything. It's been fun knowing you and all future manuscripts will be gratefully received."

"I knew I couldn't say it. I shouldn't have tried. But there won't be any future manuscripts. I've written every Holt I've ever read."

"Does that make sense?" Manning aimed the remark at the olive, but it was gone. So was the martini.

"Here's the last." He took it out of his breast-pocket, neatly folded. "The one we talked about at SCWA—the one I couldn't end. Maybe you'll understand. I wanted somehow to make it clear before . . ."

The tone of his voice projected a sense of doom, and Manning forgot everything else. "Is something going to happen to you? Are you going to—Oh, my dear, *no!* All right, so you have a wife on every space station in the asteroid belt; but if anything happens to you . . ."

"I don't know," said Norbert Holt. "I can't remember the exact date of that issue . . ." He rose abruptly. "I shouldn't have tried a goodbye. See you again, darling—the next time round Ouroboros."

She was still staring at the empty martini glass when she heard the shrill of brakes and the excited upspringing of a crowd outside.

SHE read the posthumous fragment late that night, after her eyes had dried sufficiently to make the operation practicable. And through her sorrow her mind fought to help her, making her think, making her be an editor.

She understood a little and disbelieved what she understood. And underneath she prodded herself, "But it isn't a *story*. It's too short, too inconclusive. It'll just disappoint the Holt fans—and that's everybody. Much better if I do a straight obit, take up a full page on it . . ."

She fought hard to keep on thinking, not feeling. She had never before experienced so strongly the I-have-been-here-before sensation. She had been faced with this dilemma once before, once on some other time-spiral, as the boys in SCWA would say. And her decision had been . . .

"It's sentimentality," she protested. "It isn't *editing*. This decision's right, I know it. And if I go and get another of these attacks and start to change my mind . . ."

She laid the posthumous Holt fragment on the coals. It caught fire quickly.

THE next morning Raquel greeted her with, "Manningcita, who's Norbert Holt?"

Manning had slept so restfully that she was even tolerant of foolish questions at breakfast. "Who?" she asked.

"Norbert Holt. Somehow the name popped into my mind. Is he perhaps one of your writers?"

"Never heard of him."

Raquel frowned. "I was almost sure . . . Can you really remember them all? I'm going to check those bound volumes of *Surprising*."

"Any luck with your . . . what was it? . . . Holt?" Manning asked the girl a little later.

"No, Manningcita. I was quite unsuccessful."

. . . *unsuccessful* . . . Now why in Heaven's name, mused Manning Stern, should I be thinking of martinis at breakfast time?

—ANTHONY BOUCHER

FORECAST

When Clifford D. Simak finished writing "Time Quarry," he was emotionally exhausted, a state we shared after reading it ourselves. If you aren't mentally flaccid —and GALAXY *Science Fiction* isn't edited to attract flaccid readers—you'll reach the climax of this suspenseful novel with the same increased cardiac, cerebral and psychological response that we experienced. A powerful final installment. Now if it could only have been one of those continued stories that run for decades in Japanese newspapers. . . .

But then we wouldn't be able to buy the challenging Isaac Asimov novel that starts two months from now, nor would Simak have been able to write the superb stories we have scheduled for future issues.

Speaking of superb stories, James H. Schmitz rings the triple gong of cardiac, cerebral and psychological response with "Second Night of Summer," a novelet that is a delightful account of a ghastly threat, which sounds contradictory and isn't at all. In actual fact, the entire issue can be likened to a busy Swiss bell-ringer, for the second novelet, by Raymond F. Jones, states a truism that may be the death of us yet . . . unless, literally speaking, the non-science fiction world learns the truths that science fiction has long known.

The short stories are a little more difficult to predict. We have so many wonderful ones coming up and type that refuses to be condensed. "Jaywalker" by Ross Rocklynne, for example, had to be moved back because of lack of space in this issue. But there will be at least three, perhaps four . . . plus a mind-prodding article by Willy Ley . . . and our first letter department. Genuine, unsolicited letters, selected as carefully for general interest as our stories; they must be good.

We still have a limited number of Vol. I No. I for those who want to start their subscriptions with the first issue. But don't put it off; our supply won't last long.

Coming Attraction

BY FRITZ LEIBER

Women will always go on trying to attract men... even when the future seems to have no future!

THE coupe with the fishhooks welded to the fender shouldered up over the curb like the nose of a nightmare. The girl in its path stood frozen, her face probably stiff with fright under her mask. For once my reflexes weren't shy. I took a fast step toward her, grabbed her elbow, yanked her back. Her black skirt swirled out.

The big coupe shot by, its turbine humming. I glimpsed three faces. Something ripped. I felt the hot exhaust on my ankles as the big coupe swerved back into the street. A thick cloud like a black flower blossomed from its jouncing rear end, while from the fishhooks flew a black shimmering rag.

"Did they get you?" I asked the girl.

Illustrated by Paul Calle

She had twisted around to look where the side of her skirt was torn away. She was wearing nylon tights.

"The hooks didn't touch me," she said shakily. "I guess I'm lucky."

I heard voices around us:

"Those kids! What'll they think up next?"

"They're a menace. They ought to be arrested."

Sirens screamed at a rising pitch as two motor-police, their rocket-assist jets full on, came whizzing toward us after the coupe. But the black flower had become a thick fog obscuring the whole street. The motor-police switched from rocket assists to rocket brakes and swerved to a stop near the smoke cloud.

"Are you English?" the girl aske me. "You have an English accent."

Her voice came shudderingly from behind the sleek black satin mask. I fancied her teeth must be chattering. Eyes that were perhaps blue searched my face from behind the black gauze covering the eyeholes of the mask. I told her she'd guessed right. She stood close to me. "Will you come to my place tonight?" she asked rapidly. "I can't thank you now. And there's something you can help me about."

My arm, still lightly circling her waist, felt her body trembling. I was answering the plea in that as much as in her voice when I said, "Certainly." She gave me an address south of Inferno, an apartment number and a time. She asked me my name and I told her.

"Hey, you!"

I turned obediently to the policeman's shout. He shooed away the small clucking crowd of masked women and barefaced men. Coughing from the smoke that the black coupe had thrown out, he asked for my papers. I handed him the essential ones.

HE LOOKED at them and then at me. "British Barter? How long will you be in New York?"

Suppressing the urge to say, "For as short a time as possible," I told him I'd be here for a week or so.

"May need you as a witness," he explained. "Those kids can't use smoke on us. When they do that, we pull them in."

He seemed to think the smoke was the bad thing. "They tried to kill the lady," I pointed out.

He shook his head wisely. "They always pretend they're going to, but actually they just want to snag skirts. I've picked up rippers with as many as fifty skirt-snags tacked up in their rooms. Of course, sometimes they come a little too close."

I explained that if I hadn't yanked her out of the way, she'd have been hit by more than hooks. But he interrupted, "If she'd thought it was a real murder attempt, she'd have stayed here."

I looked around. It was true. She was gone.

"She was fearfully frightened," I told him.

"Who wouldn't be? Those kids

would have scared old Stalin himself."

"I mean frightened of more than 'kids.' They didn't look like 'kids.'"

"What did they look like?"

I tried without much success to describe the three faces. A vague impression of viciousness and effeminacy doesn't mean much.

"Well, I could be wrong," he said finally. "Do you know the girl? Where she lives?"

"No," I half lied.

The other policeman hung up his radiophone and ambled toward us, kicking at the tendrils of dissipating smoke. The black cloud no longer hid the dingy facades with their five-year-old radiation flash-burns, and I could begin to make out the distant stump of the Empire State Building, thrusting up out of Inferno like a mangled finger.

"They haven't been picked up so far," the approaching policeman grumbled. "Left smoke for five blocks, from what Ryan says."

The first policeman shook his head. "That's bad," he observed solemnly.

I was feeling a bit uneasy and ashamed. An Englishman shouldn't lie, at least not on impulse.

"They sound like nasty customers," the first policeman continued in the same grim tone. "We'll need witnesses. Looks as if you may have to stay in New York longer than you expect."

I got the point. I said, "I forgot to show you all my papers," and handed him a few others, making sure there was a five dollar bill in among them.

WHEN he handed them back a bit later, his voice was no longer ominous. My feelings of guilt vanished. To cement our relationship, I chatted with the two of them about their job.

"I suppose the masks give you some trouble," I observed. "Over in England we've been reading about your new crop of masked female bandits."

"Those things get exaggerated," the first policeman assured me. "It's the men masking as women that really mix us up. But, brother, when we nab them, we jump on them with both feet."

"And you get so you can spot women almost as well as if they had naked faces," the second policeman volunteered. "You know, hands and all that."

"Especially all that," the first agreed with a chuckle. "Say, is it true that some girls don't mask over in England?"

"A number of them have picked up the fashion," I told him. "Only a few, though—the ones who always adopt the latest style, however extreme."

"They're usually masked in the British newscasts."

"I imagine it's arranged that way out of deference to American taste," I confessed. "Actually, not very many do mask."

The second policeman considered that. "Girls going down the street bare from the neck up." It was not clear whether he viewed the prospect with relish or moral distaste. Likely both.

"A few members keep trying to persuade Parliament to enact a law forbidding all masking," I continued, talking perhaps a bit too much.

The second policeman shook his head. "What an idea. You know, masks are a pretty good thing, brother. Couple of years more and I'm going to make my wife wear hers around the house."

The first policeman shrugged. "If women were to stop wearing masks, in six weeks you wouldn't know the difference. You get used to anything, if enough people do or don't do it."

I agreed, rather regretfully, and left them. I turned north on Broadway (old Tenth Avenue, I believe) and walked rapidly until I was beyond Inferno. Passing such an area of undecontaminated radioactivity always makes a person queasy. I thanked God there weren't any such in England, as yet.

The street was almost empty, though I was accosted by a couple of beggars with faces tunneled by H-bomb scars, whether real or of makeup putty, I couldn't tell. A fat woman held out a baby with webbed fingers and toes. I told myself it would have been deformed anyway and that she was only capitalizing on our fear of bomb-induced mutations. Still, I gave her a seven-and-a-half-cent piece. Her mask made me feel I was paying tribute to an African fetish.

"May all your children be blessed with one head and two eyes, sir."

"Thanks," I said, shuddering, and hurried past her.

". . . There's only trash behind the mask, so turn your head, stick to your task: Stay away, stay away—from—the—girls!"

THIS last was the end of an anti-sex song being sung by some religionists half a block from the circle-and-cross insignia of a femalist temple. They reminded me only faintly of our small tribe of British monastics. Above their heads was a jumble of billboards advertising predigested foods, wrestling instruction, radio handies and the like.

I stared at the hysterical slogans with disagreeable fascination. Since the female face and form have been banned on American signs, the very letters of the advertiser's alphabet have begun to crawl with sex—the fat-bellied, big-breasted capital B, the lascivious double O. However, I reminded myself, it is chiefly the mask that so strangely accents sex in America.

A British anthropologist has pointed out, that, while it took more than 5,000 years to shift the chief point of sexual interest from the hips to the breasts, the next transition to the face has taken less than 50 years. Comparing the American style with

Moslem tradition is not valid; Moslem women are compelled to wear veils, the purpose of which is concealment, while American women have only the compulsion of fashion and use masks to create mystery.

Theory aside, the actual origins of the trend are to be found in the anti-radiation clothing of World War III, which, led to masked wrestling, now a fantastically popular sport, and that in turn led to the current female fashion. Only a wild style at first, masks quickly became as necessary as brassieres and lipsticks had been earlier in the century.

I finally realized that I was not speculating about masks in general, but about what lay behind one in particular. That's the devil of the things; you're never sure whether a girl is heightening loveliness or hiding ugliness. I pictured a cool, pretty face in which fear showed only in widened eyes. Then I remembered her blonde hair, rich against the blackness of the satin mask. She'd told me to come at the twenty-second hour—ten p.m.

I climbed to my apartment near the British Consulate; the elevator shaft had been shoved out of plumb by an old blast, a nuisance in these tall New York buildings. Before it occurred to me that I would be going out again, I automatically tore a tab from the film strip under my shirt. I developed it just to be sure. It showed that the total radiation I'd taken that day was still within the safety limit. I'm not phobic about it, as so many people are these days, but there's no point in taking chances.

I flopped down on the day bed and stared at the silent speaker and the dark screen of the video set. As always, they made me think, somewhat bitterly, of the two great nations of the world. Mutilated by each other, yet still strong, they were crippled giants poisoning the planet with their dreams of an impossible equality and an impossible success.

I fretfully switched on the speaker. By luck, the newscaster was talking excitedly of the prospects of a bumper wheat crop, sown by planes across a dust bowl moistened by seeded rains. I listened carefully to the rest of the program (it was remarkably clear of Russian telejamming) but there was no further news of interest to me. And, of course, no mention of the Moon, though everyone knows that America and Russia are racing to develop their primary bases into fortresses capable of mutual assault and the launching of alphabet-bombs toward Earth. I myself knew perfectly well that the British electronic equipment I was helping trade for American wheat was destined for use in spaceships.

I SWITCHED off the newscast. It was growing dark and once again I pictured a tender, frightened face behind a mask. I hadn't had a date since England. It's exceedingly difficult to become acquainted with a girl in America, where as little as a smile, often, can set one of them yelping

for the police—to say nothing of the increasing puritanical morality and the roving gangs that keep most women indoors after dark. And naturally, the masks which are definitely not, as the Soviets claim, a last invention of capitalist degeneracy, but a sign of great psychological insecurity. The Russians have no masks, but they have their own signs of stress.

I went to the window and impatiently watched the darkness gather. I was getting very restless. After a while a ghostly violet cloud appeared to the south. My hair rose. Then I laughed. I had momentarily fancied it a radiation from the crater of the Hell-bomb, though I should instantly have known it was only the radio-induced glow in the sky over the amusement and residential area south of Inferno.

Promptly at twenty-two hours I stood before the door of my unknown girl friend's apartment. The electronic say-who-please said just that. I answered clearly, "Wysten Turner," wondering if she'd given my name to the mechanism. She evidently had, for the door opened. I walked into a small empty living room, my heart pounding a bit.

The room was expensively furnished with the latest pneumatic hassocks and sprawlers. There were some midgie books on the table. The one I picked up was the standard hard-boiled detective story in which two female murderers go gunning for each other.

The television was on. A masked girl in green was crooning a love song. Her right hand held something that blurred off into the foreground. I saw the set had a handie, which we haven't in England as yet, and curiously thrust my hand into the handie orifice beside the screen. Contrary to my expectations, it was not like slipping into a pulsing rubber glove, but rather as if the girl on the screen actually held my hand.

A door opened behind me. I jerked out my hand with as guilty a reaction as if I'd been caught peering through a keyhole.

She stood in the bedroom doorway. I think she was trembling. She was wearing a gray fur coat, white-speckled, and a gray velvet evening mask with shirred gray lace around the eyes and mouth. Her fingernails twinkled like silver.

It hadn't occurred to me that she'd expect us to go out.

"I should have told you," she said softly. Her mask veered nervously toward the books and the screen and the room's dark corners. "But I can't possibly talk to you here."

I said doubtfully, "There's a place near the Consulate. . . ."

"I know where we can be together and talk," she said rapidly. "If you don't mind."

As we entered the elevator I said, "I'm afraid I dismissed the cab."

BUT the cab driver hadn't gone for some reason of his own. He jumped out and smirkingly held

the front door open for us. I told him we preferred to sit in back. He sulkily opened the rear door, slammed it after us, jumped in front and slammed the door behind him.

My companion leaned forward. "Heaven," she said.

The driver switched on the turbine and televisor.

"Why did you ask if I were a British subject?" I said, to start the conversation.

She leaned away from me, tilting her mask close to the window. "See the Moon," she said in a quick, dreamy voice.

"But why, really?" I pressed, conscious of an irritation that had nothing to do with her.

"It's edging up into the purple of the sky."

"And what's your name?"

"The purple makes it look yellower."

JUST then I became aware of the source of my irritation. It lay in the square of writhing light in the front of the cab beside the driver.

I don't object to ordinary wrestling matches, though they bore me, but I simply detest watching a man wrestle a woman. The fact that the bouts are generally "on the level," with the man greatly outclassed in weight and reach and the masked females young and personable, only makes them seem worse to me.

"Please turn off the screen," I requested the driver.

He shook his head without looking around. "Uh-uh, man," he said. "They've been grooming that babe for weeks for this bout with Little Zirk."

Infuriated, I reached forward, but my companion caught my arm. "Please," she whispered frightenedly, shaking her head.

I settled back, frustrated. She was closer to me now, but silent and for a few moments I watched the heaves and contortions of the powerful masked girl and her wiry masked opponent on the screen. His frantic scrambling at her reminded me of a male spider.

I jerked around, facing my companion. "Why did those three men want to kill you?" I asked sharply.

The eyeholes of her mask faced the screen. "Because they're jealous of me," she whispered.

"Why are they jealous?"

She still didn't look at me. "Because of him."

"Who?"

She didn't answer.

I put my arm around her shoulders. "Are you afraid to tell me?" I asked. "What *is* the matter?"

She still didn't look my way. She smelled nice.

"See here," I said laughingly, changing my tactics, "you really should tell me something about yourself. I don't even know what you look like."

I half playfully lifted my hand to the band of her neck. She gave it an astonishingly swift slap. I pulled it away in sudden pain. There were

four tiny indentations on the back. From one of them a tiny bead of blood welled out as I watched. I looked at her silver fingernails and saw they were actually delicate and pointed metal caps.

"I'm dreadfully sorry," I heard her say, "but you frightened me. I thought for a moment you were going to. . . ."

At last she turned to me. Her coat had fallen open. Her evening dress was Cretan Revival, a bodice of lace beneath and supporting the breasts without covering them.

"Don't be angry," she said, putting her arms around my neck. "You were wonderful this afternoon."

The soft gray velvet of her mask, molding itself to her cheek, pressed mine. Through the mask's lace the wet warm tip of her tongue touched my chin.

"I'm not angry," I said. "Just puzzled and anxious to help."

The cab stopped. To either side were black windows bordered by spears of broken glass. The sickly purple light showed a few ragged figures slowly moving toward us.

The driver muttered, "It's the turbine, man. We're grounded." He sat there hunched and motionless. "Wish it had happened somewhere else."

My companion whispered, "Five dollars is the usual amount."

She looked out so shudderingly at the congregating figures that I suppressed my indignation and did as she suggested. The driver took the bill without a word. As he started up, he put his hand out the window and I heard a few coins clink on the pavement.

My companion came back into my arms, but her mask faced the television screen, where the tall girl had just pinned the convulsively kicking Little Zirk.

"I'm so frightened," she breathed.

HEAVEN turned out to be an equally ruinous neighborhood, but it had a club with an awning and a huge doorman uniformed like a spaceman, but in gaudy colors. In my sensuous daze I rather liked it all. We stepped out of the cab just as a drunken old woman came down the sidewalk, her mask awry. A couple ahead of us turned their heads from the half revealed face, as if from an ugly body at the beach. As we followed them in I heard the doorman say, "Get along, grandma, and watch yourself."

Inside, everything was dimness and blue glows. She had said we could talk here, but I didn't see how. Besides the inevitable chorus of sneezes and coughs (they say America is fifty per cent allergic these days), there was a band going full blast in the latest robop style, in which an electronic composing machine selects an arbitrary sequence of tones into which the musicians weave their raucous little individualities.

Most of the people were in booths. The band was behind the bar. On a small platform beside them, a girl was dancing, stripped to her mask.

The little cluster of men at the shadowy far end of the bar weren't looking at her.

We inspected the menu in gold script on the wall and pushed the buttons for breast of chicken, fried shrimps and two scotches. Moments later, the serving bell tinkled. I opened the gleaming panel and took out our drinks.

THE cluster of men at the bar filed off toward the door, but first they stared around the room. My companion had just thrown back her coat. Their look lingered on our booth. I noticed that there were three of them.

The band chased off the dancing girl with growls. I handed my companion a straw and we sipped our drinks.

"You wanted me to help you about something," I said. "Incidentally, I think you're lovely."

She nodded quick thanks, looked around, leaned forward. "Would it be hard for me to get to England?"

"No," I replied, a bit taken aback. "Provided you have an American passport."

"Are they difficult to get?"

"Rather," I said, surprised at her lack of information. "Your country doesn't like its nationals to travel, though it isn't quite as stringent as Russia."

"Could the British Consulate help me get a passport?"

"It's hardly their. . . ."

"Could you?"

I realized we were being inspected. A man and two girls had paused opposite our table. The girls were tall and wolfish-looking, with spangled masks. The man stood jauntily between them like a fox on its hind legs.

My companion didn't glance at them, but she sat back. I noticed that one of the girls had a big yellow bruise on her forearm. After a moment they walked to a booth in the deep shadows.

"Know them?" I asked. She didn't reply. I finished my drink. "I'm not sure you'd like England," I said. "The austerity's altogether different from your American brand of misery."

She leaned forward again. "But I must get away," she whispered.

"Why?" I was getting impatient.

"Because I'm so frightened."

There were chimes. I opened the panel and handed her the fried shrimps. The sauce on my breast of chicken was a delicious steaming compound of almonds, soy and ginger. But something must have been wrong with the radionic oven that had thawed and heated it, for at the first bite I crunched a kernel of ice in the meat. These delicate mechanisms need constant repair and there aren't enough mechanics.

I put down my fork. "What are you really scared of?" I asked her.

For once her mask didn't waver away from my face. As I waited I could feel the fears gathering without her naming them, tiny dark

shapes swarming through the curved night outside, converging on the radioactive pest spot of New York, dipping into the margins of the purple. I felt a sudden rush of sympathy, a desire to protect the girl opposite me. The warm feeling added itself to the infatuation engendered in the cab.

"Everything," she said finally.

I nodded and touched her hand.

"I'm afraid of the Moon," she began, her voice going dreamy and brittle as it had in the cab. "You can't look at it and not think of guided bombs."

"It's the same Moon over England," I reminded her.

"But it's not England's Moon any more. It's ours and Russia's. You're not responsible."

I pressed her hand.

"Oh, and then," she said with a tilt of her mask, "I'm afraid of the cars and the gangs and the loneliness and Inferno. I'm afraid of the lust that undresses your face. And—" her voice hushed—"I'm afraid of the wrestlers."

"Yes?" I prompted softly after a moment.

HER mask came forward. "Do you know something about the wrestlers?" she asked rapidly. "The ones that wrestle women, I mean. They often lose, you know. And then they have to have a girl to take their frustration out on. A girl who's soft and weak and terribly frightened. They need that, to keep them men. Other men don't want them to have a girl. Other men want them just to fight women and be heroes. But they must have a girl. It's horrible for her."

I squeezed her fingers tighter, as if courage could be transmitted—granting I had any. "I think I can get you to England," I said.

Shadows crawled onto the table and stayed there. I looked up at the three men who had been at the end of the bar. They were the men I had seen in the big coupe. They wore black sweaters and close-fitting black trousers. Their faces were as expressionless as dopers. Two of them stood above me. The other loomed over the girl.

"Drift off, man," I was told. I heard the other inform the girl: "We'll wrestle a fall, sister. What shall it be? Judo, slapsie or kill-who-can?"

I stood up. There are times when an Englishman simply must be maltreated. But just then the foxlike man came gliding in like the star of a ballet. The reaction of the other three startled me. They were acutely embarrassed.

He smiled at them thinly. "You won't win my favor by tricks like this," he said.

"Don't get the wrong idea, Zirk," one of them pleaded.

"I will if it's right," he said. "She told me what you tried to do this afternoon. That won't endear you to me, either. Drift."

They backed off awkwardly. "Let's

get out of here," one of them said loudly, as they turned. "I know a place where they fight naked with knives."

LITTLE ZIRK laughed musically and slipped into the seat beside my companion. She shrank from him, just a little. I pushed my feet back, leaned forward.

"Who's your friend, baby?" he asked, not looking at her.

She passed the question to me with a little gesture. I told him.

"British," he observed. "She's been asking you about getting out of the country? About passports?" He smiled pleasantly. "She likes to start running away. Don't you, baby?" His small hand began to stroke her wrist, the fingers bent a little, the tendons ridged, as if he were about to grab and twist.

"Look here," I said sharply. "I have to be grateful to you for ordering off those bullies, but—"

"Think nothing of it," he told me. "They're no harm except when they're behind steering wheels. A well-trained fourteen-year-old girl could cripple any one of them. Why, even Theda here, if she went in for that sort of thing. . . ." He turned to her, shifting his hand from her wrist to her hair. He stroked it, letting the strands slip slowly through his fingers. "You know I lost tonight, baby, don't you?" he said softly.

I stood up. "Come along," I said to her. "Let's leave."

SHE just sat there. I couldn't even tell if she was trembling. I tried to read a message in her eyes through the mask.

"I'll take you away," I said to her. "I can do it. I really will."

He smiled at me. "She'd like to go with you," he said. "Wouldn't you, baby?"

"Will you or won't you?" I said to her. She still just sat there.

He slowly knotted his fingers in her hair.

"Listen, you little vermin," I snapped at him. "Take your hands off her."

He came up from the seat like a snake. I'm no fighter. I just know that the more scared I am, the harder and straighter I hit. This time I was lucky. But as he crumpled back, I felt a slap and four stabs of pain in my cheek. I clapped my hand to it. I could feel the four gashes made by her dagger finger caps, and the warm blood oozing out from them.

She didn't look at me. She was bending over little Zirk and cuddling her mask to his cheek and crooning: "There, there, don't feel bad, you'll be able to hurt me afterward."

There were sounds around us, but they didn't come close. I leaned forward and ripped the mask from her face.

I really don't know why I should have expected her face to be anything else. It was very pale, of course, and there weren't any cosmetics. I suppose there's no point in

wearing any under a mask. The eyebrows were untidy and the lips chapped. But as for the general expression, as for the feelings crawling and wriggling across it—

Have you ever lifted a rock from damp soil? Have you ever watched the slimy white grubs?

I looked down at her, she up at me. "Yes, you're so frightened, aren't you?" I said sarcastically. "You dread this little nightly drama, don't you? You're scared to death."

And I walked right out into the purple night, still holding my hand to my bleeding cheek. No one stopped me, not even the girl wrestlers. I wished I could tear a tab from under my shirt, and test it then and there, and find I'd taken too much radiation, and so be able to ask to cross the Hudson and go down New Jersey, past the lingering radiance of the Narrows Bomb, and so on to Sandy Hook to wait for the rusty ship that would take me back over the seas to England.

—FRITZ LEIBER

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BOOK-LENGTH SERIAL—Installment 3

TIME QUARRY ..... *by Clifford D. Simak*

NOVELETS

SECOND NIGHT OF SUMMER ..... *by James H. Schmitz*
A STONE AND A SPEAR ..... *by Raymond F. Jones*

SHORT STORIES★

JAYWALKER ..... *by Ross Rocklynne*
BETELGEUSE BRIDGE ..... *by William Tenn*
JUDAS RAM ..... *by Sam Merwin*
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FEATURES

EDITOR'S PAGE
GALAXY'S FIVE-STAR SHELF
FORECAST
LETTERS

★Short stories subject to space requirements, but at least three will be included.

BY GROFF CONKLIN

IF THE conductor of this department has a mission, it is to propagandize for adult science fiction of the sort that is carried in the other pages of this magazine. Consequently, he may tend to bear down harder than he should on some of the current output, since he is interested in seeing science fiction become an accepted and respected branch of literature. This it cannot be until book publishers, and magazine editors as well, begin to put more emphasis on the mature competence of the material they buy.

Of the five books before us, only one actually measures up to the fairly moderate standards mentioned. That is Theodore Sturgeon's *The Dreaming Jewels* (Greenberg, 217 pages, $2.50). In essence, I suppose, this book should be classed as a science fantasy rather than science fiction. It is somewhat similar in basic nature to Eric Frank Russell's famous *Sinister Barrier*, though practically the opposite in intent and completely unlike in plot. While Russell's infamous infra-red beings interfered at all times with human-

ity, and were responsible for its wars, crimes, diseases and other ills, the strange extra-solar entities that Sturgeon envisages living on earth, in the deceptive form of small, carefully hidden, jewel-like stones, seem to have no interest whatsoever in the affairs of man. Their only interference arises from their curious matings, which seem to result, not in other jewels, but in replicas of things earthly, whether trees, dogs, snakes —or men. These replicas, which ordinarily cannot be found because no one knows what to look for, often are defective, especially when conceived parthenogenetically (the jewels' sex life seems to operate both ways). When the defectives are animal, they are likely to end up in circus side shows and carnival booths.

The Dreaming Jewels is the story of an orphan boy who runs away from his brutal foster parents and is taken in by a troupe of sideshow people who are passing through town in their carnival truck. The manager of this particular aggregation is a brilliant, cruel, practically insane doctor who has discovered the existence of the dreaming jewels and who, in his bitter hatred of mankind, is attempting to gain control over these mysterious visitants from outer space.

The book is full of human warmth and also of nearly sub-human evil. The side show the boy lives with—Havana, Bunny, Solum the Alligator-Skinned Man, and particularly the exquisite and brilliant little midget beauty, Zena—are real and believable human beings. On the other hand, Sturgeon's villains, particularly the foster father, are much too villainous for full-blown characters. It is true that the doctor himself is a real and frightening person, yet even he is slightly overdone. But these are minor flaws in an otherwise rich book.

Even more important, *The Dreaming Jewels* is excellently written, with a feeling for words for which Sturgeon has long been admired by his readers. This is one book, incidentally, which has been thoroughly and painstakingly worked over since its original appearance in *Fantastic Adventures* late last year. In its present form, it is a moving and brilliant piece of imaginative writing, and a fine "first" for a regular publisher who is newly entering the science fiction field. One can only hope that Greenberg, Inc., can maintain something of the same level in future output.

The newest entry of Doubleday and Company, publishers of such excellent science fiction as Bradbury's *The Martian Chronicles,* Merrill's *The Shadow on the Hearth,* and Clement's *Needle,* is Nelson Bond's *Lancelot Biggs, Spaceman,* (224 pages, $2.50). Written originally for the lower levels of the pulp audience, this unedited and hastily put together collection of pseudo-humorous short stories with the same characters throughout is far inferior

in quality to the previous titles on Doubleday's list.

Biggs is that staple character of pulp fiction, the fumbling dope who crashes through as the Big Brain, the genius-in-spite-of-himself, who rescues the pretty maiden and pays off the mortgage at the last moment. In this instance, he is a haywire "scientist," young, gawky, brash, awkward and goofy, who is constantly rescuing the spaceship on which he is an unwanted and rejected member of the crew from various foul and shuddery fates with his fantastic baling-wire-and-intuition gadgets. In the end he marries the boss's daughter and sacrifices himself to salve the boss's own egotism.

L. Sprague de Camp's and P. Schuyler Miller's collaborative *Genus Homo* (Fantasy Press, 225 pages, $3.00), does not suffer from the particular ailment—juvenilitis—that so disfigures Lancelot Biggs. It is fairly mature both in concept and in writing. A bus full of a most miscellaneous group of people is buried in a landslide somewhere in western Pennsylvania, and there it remains for millions of years in suspended animation, until something wakes the people up to a new world in which there are no human beings left. It is a world in which the apes have developed civilizations of their own, and where most other small animals once familiar on earth have become much larger in size, many of them being mankillers.

Much of the story is devoted to the attempts of the oddly assorted busload to save their lives from the huge beaveroids, rabbitoids, and the like, and to accommodate themselves later to the peaceful, highly intelligent, but very different non-metallurgical civilization of the gorillas that are the dominant race on the American continent. In the end, the humans arrive at a *modus vivendi* with the gorillas, after helping to defeat an invasion of European or African baboons, and one is led to assume that eventually they will climb back to their original supremacy of millions of years earlier.

The only trouble with *Genus Homo* is that it was not given the necessary additional attention it needed when it was translated from magazine to book form. In this instance it is not continuity, character or style that suffers, but simply the fact that, for a book, it is sketchy and incomplete.

NEVERTHELESS, *Genus Homo* is a story with real merit, and it deserves wide reading.

The practically ubiquitous Mr. de Camp appears as collaborator on another novel, one of two recently published by Gnome Press. This is *The Castle of Iron* (224 pages, $2.50), one of four fantasy collaborations of de Camp and Fletcher Pratt. Like the three earlier Pratt-de Camp books, *The Castle of Iron* deals much more with magic mumbo-jumbo than it does with the extrapolations of modern science, and for that reason does

not rate full coverage in this strictly science fiction column. The authors assume that the spells and potions of ancient and medieval magicians can do what they claim, and fairy-tale adventures result from this notion.

The other new Gnome item is William Grey Beyer's *Minions of the Moon* (190 pages, $2.50), reprinted from one of the Munsey magazines circa 1939. This is another "throw-ahead" tale, similar in some respects to *Genus Homo,* but inferior both in writing and in concept. In imitation Thorne Smith style, it tells about a chap named Mark Nevin, who is transported into a far future in which, of course, all traces of our current civilization seem to have vanished, and he has to make his way alone in a strange land. However, he is conveniently provided, by the super-scientist who "suspended his animation," with a large supply of scientific, technical and cultural materials to help him along. He has it pretty easy. . . .

There are many remnants of the human race in this particular world, including a luscious blonde named Nona Barr, and one excessively odd and incredible character, a bodyless Jinn whose home habitation is the moon, and who can make himself visible on earth only by building imitations of other earth creatures for himself to inhabit. This Jinn, with unaccountable contrariness, sometimes helps and sometimes hinders Mark and Nona in their efforts to escape bands of black-bearded cannibals, the tight little bureaucratic society where Nona herself had been raised, innumerable strange animals and dangerous tribes, and finally two mad Muscovite Russian Brains (how they will drag our own ephemeral politics into any future they write about!) who are trying to take over what is left of mankind by means of war, rapine and superhuman powers.

All very well to pass a mindless hour, but don't expect more.

MENTION should be made here, also, of Grosset and Dunlap's new dollar reprint series of science fiction classics, the first four volumes of which should be in your local bookstores as this issue becomes available. Included among the four are the first two Simon & Schuster science fiction novels, A. E. van Vogt's *The World of A* and Jack Williamsons' *The Humanoids,* the former with a bright, brash new four-color cover. In addition, the editor of the series (who turns out to be none other than the conductor of this department) has included a wonderful old S. Fowler Wright item called *The Island of Captain Sparrow,* certainly one of the most charming desert-island science fantasies ever written. The last book is Henry Kuttner's *Fury,* reprinted directly from *Astounding Science Fiction,* where it appeared under the pseudonym Laurence O'Donnell.

—GROFF CONKLIN

To Serve Man

BY DAMON KNIGHT

Wonderful gifts should be accepted gratefully. But always the memory of Indian givers and Greek gift-bearers creates doubt!

Illustrated by David Stone

THE Kanamit were not very pretty, it's true. They looked something like pigs and something like people, and that is not an attractive combination. Seeing them for the first time shocked you; that was their handicap. When a thing with the countenance of a fiend comes from the stars and offers a gift, you are disinclined to accept.

I don't know what we expected interstellar visitors to look like—those who thought about it at all, that is. Angels, perhaps, or something too alien to be really awful. Maybe that's why we were all so horrified and repelled when they landed in their great ships and we saw what they really were like.

The Kanamit were short and very

hairy—thick, bristly brown-gray hair all over their abominably plump bodies. Their noses were snoutlike and their eyes small, and they had thick hands of three fingers each. They wore green leather harness and green shorts, but I think the shorts were a concession to our notions of public decency. The garments were quite modishly cut, with slash pockets and half-belts in the back. The Kanamit had a sense of humor, anyhow; their clothes proved it.

There were three of them at this session of the U. N., and I can't tell you how queer it looked to see them there in the middle of a solemn Plenary Session—three fat piglike creatures in green harness and shorts, sitting at the long table below the podium, surrounded by the packed arcs of delegates from every nation. They sat correctly upright, politely watching each speaker. Their flat ears drooped over the earphones. Later on, I believe, they learned every human language, but at this time they knew only French and English.

They seemed perfectly at ease—and that, along with their humor, was a thing that tended to make me like them. I was in the minority; I didn't think they were trying to put anything over. They said quite simply that they wanted to help us and I believed it. As a U. N. translator, of course, my opinion didn't matter, but I thought they were the best thing that ever happened to Earth.

The delegate from Argentina got up and said that his government was interested by the demonstration of a new cheap power source, which the Kanamit had made at the previous session, but that the Argentine government could not commit itself as to its future policy without a much more thorough examination.

IT WAS what all the delegates were saying, but I had to pay particular attention to Senor Valdes, because he tended to sputter and his diction was bad. I got through the translation all right, with only one or two momentary hesitations, and then switched to the Polish-English line to hear how Gregori was doing with Janciewicz. Janciewicz was the cross Gregori had to bear, just as Valdes was mine.

Janciewicz repeated the previous remarks with a few ideological variations, and then the Secretary-General recognized the delegate from France, who introduced Dr. Denis Leveque, the criminologist, and a great deal of complicated equipment was wheeled in.

Dr. Leveque remarked that the question in many people's minds had been aptly expressed by the delegate from the U. S. S. R. at the preceding session, when he demanded, "What is the motive of the Kanamit? What is their purpose in offering us these unprecedented gifts, while asking nothing in return?"

The doctor then said, "At the request of several delegates and with the full consent of our guests, the Kanamit, my associates and I have

made a series of tests upon the Kanamit with the equipment which you see before you. These tests will now be repeated."

A murmur ran through the chamber. There was a fusillade of flashbulbs, and one of the TV cameras moved up to focus on the instrument board of the doctor's equipment. At the same time, the huge television screen behind the podium lighted up, and we saw the blank faces of two dials, each with its pointer resting at zero, and a strip of paper tape with a stylus point resting against it.

The doctor's assistants were fastening wires to the temples of one of the Kanamit, wrapping a canvas-covered rubber tube around his forearm, and taping something to the palm of his right hand.

In the screen, we saw the paper tape begin to move while the stylus traced a slow zigzag pattern along it. One of the needles began to jump rhythmically; the other flipped over and stayed there, wavering slightly.

"These are the standard instruments for testing the truth of a statement," said Dr. Leveque. "Our first object, since the physiology of the Kanamit is unknown to us, was to determine whether or not they react to these tests as human beings do. We will now repeat one of the many experiments which was made in the endeavor to discover this."

He pointed to the first dial. "This instrument registers the subject's heart-beat. This shows the electrical conductivity of the skin in the palm of his hand, a measure of perspiration, which increases under stress. And this—" pointing to the tape-and-stylus device— "shows the pattern and intensity of the electrical waves emanating from his brain. It has been shown, with human subjects, that all these readings vary markedly depending upon whether the subject is speaking the truth."

HE PICKED up two large pieces of cardboard, one red and one black. The red one was a square about a meter on a side; the black was a rectangle a meter and a half long. He addressed himself to the Kanama:

"Which of these is longer than the other?"

"The red," said the Kanama.

Both needles leaped wildly, and so did the line on the unrolling tape.

"I shall repeat the question," said the doctor. "Which of these is longer than the other?"

"The black," said the creature.

This time the instruments continued in their normal rhythm.

"How did you come to this planet?" asked the doctor.

"Walked," replied the Kanama.

Again the instruments responded, and there was a subdued ripple of laughter in the chamber.

"Once more," said the doctor, "how did you come to this planet?"

"In a spaceship," said the Kanama, and the instruments did not jump.

The doctor again faced the delegates. "Many such experiments were

made," he said, "and my colleagues and myself are satisfied that the mechanisms are effective. Now," he turned to the Kanama, "I shall ask our distinguished guest to reply to the question put at the last session by the delegate of the U. S. S. R., namely, what is the motive of the Kanamit people in offering these great gifts to the people of Earth?"

The Kanama rose. Speaking this time in English, he said, "On my planet there is a saying, 'There are more riddles in a stone than in a philosopher's head.' The motives of intelligent beings, though they may at times appear obscure, are simple things compared to the complex workings of the natural universe. Therefore I hope that the people of Earth will understand, and believe, when I tell you that our mission upon your planet is simply this—to bring to you the peace and plenty which we ourselves enjoy, and which we have in the past brought to other races throughout the galaxy. When your world has no more hunger, no more war, no more needless suffering, that will be our reward."

And the needles had not jumped once.

The delegate from the Ukraine jumped to his feet, asking to be recognized, but the time was up and the Secretary-General closed the session.

I MET Gregori as we were leaving the U. N. chamber. His face was red with excitement. "Who promoted that circus?" he demanded.

"The tests looked genuine to me," I told him.

"A circus!" he said vehemently. "A second-rate farce! If they were genuine, Peter, why was debate stifled?"

"There'll be time for debate tomorrow surely."

"Tomorrow the doctor and his instruments will be back in Paris. Plenty of things can happen before tomorrow. In the name of sanity, man, how can anybody trust a thing that looks as if it ate the baby?"

I was a little annoyed. I said, "Are you sure you're not more worried about their politics than their appearance?"

He said, "Bah," and went away.

The next day reports began to come in from government laboratories all over the world where the Kanamit's power source was being tested. They were wildly enthusiastic. I don't understand such things myself, but it seemed that those little metal boxes would give more electrical power than an atomic pile, for next to nothing and nearly forever. And it was said that they were so cheap to manufacture that everybody in the world could have one of his own. In the early afternoon there were reports that seventeen countries had already begun to set up factories to turn them out.

The next day the Kanamit turned up with plans and specimens of a gadget that would increase the fertility of any arable land by sixty to

one hundred per cent. It speeded the formation of nitrates in the soil, or something. There was nothing in the headlines but the Kanamit any more. The day after that, they dropped their bombshell.

"You now have potentially unlimited power and increased food supply," said one of them. He pointed with his three-fingered hand to an instrument that stood on the table before him. It was a box on a tripod, with a parabolic reflector on the front of it. "We offer you today a third gift which is at least as important as the first two."

He beckoned to the TV men to roll their cameras into closeup position. Then he picked up a large sheet of cardboard covered with drawings and English lettering. We saw it on the large screen above the podium; it was all clearly legible.

"We are informed that this broadcast is being relayed throughout your world," said the Kanama. "I wish that everyone who has equipment for taking photographs from television screens would use it now."

The Secretary-General leaned forward and asked a question sharply, but the Kanama ignored him.

"This device," he said, "projects a field in which no explosive, of whatever nature, can detonate."

There was an uncomprehending silence.

The Kanama said, "It cannot now be suppressed. If one nation has it, all must have it." When nobody seemed to understand, he explained bluntly, "There will be no more war."

THAT was the biggest news of the millennium, and it was perfectly true. It turned out that the explosions the Kanama was talking about included gasoline and Diesel explosions. They had simply made it impossible for anybody to mount or equip a modern army.

We could have gone back to bows and arrows, of course, but that wouldn't have satisfied the military. Not after having atomic bombs and all the rest. Besides, there wouldn't be any reason to make war. Every nation would soon have everything.

Nobody ever gave another thought to those lie-detector experiments, or asked the Kanamit what their politics were. Gregori was put out; he had nothing to prove his suspicions.

I quit my job with the U. N. a few months later, because I foresaw that it was going to die under me anyhow. U. N. business was booming at the time, but after a year or so there was going to be nothing for it to do. Every nation on Earth was well on the way to being completely self-supporting; they weren't going to need much arbitration.

I accepted a position as translator with the Kanamit Embassy, and it was there that I ran into Gregori again. I was glad to see him, but I couldn't imagine what he was doing there.

"I thought you were on the opposition," I said. "Don't tell me

you're convinced the Kanamit are all right."

He looked rather shamefaced. "They're not what they look, anyhow," he said.

It was as much of a concession as he could decently make, and I invited him down to the embassy lounge for a drink. It was an intimate kind of place, and he grew confidential over the second daiquiri.

"They fascinate me," he said. "I hate them instinctively on sight still—that hasn't changed, but I can evaluate it. You were right, obviously; they mean us nothing but good. But do you know—" he leaned across the table—"the question of the Soviet delegate was never answered."

I am afraid I snorted.

"No, really," he said. "They told us what they wanted to do—'to bring to you the peace and plenty which we ourselves enjoy.' But they didn't say *why*."

"Why do missionaries—"

"Hogwash!" he said angrily. "Missionaries have a religious motive. If these creatures do own a religion, they haven't once mentioned it. What's more, they didn't send a missionary group, they sent a diplomatic delegation—a group representing the will and policy of their whole people. Now just what have the Kanamit, as a people or a nation, got to gain from our welfare?"

I said, "Cultural—"

"Cultural cabbage-soup! No, it's something less obvious than that, something obscure that belongs to their psychology and not to ours. But trust me, Peter, there is no such thing as a completely disinterested altruism. In one way or another, they have something to gain."

"And that's why you're here," I said, "to try to find out what it is?"

"Correct. I wanted to get on one of the ten-year exchange groups to their home planet, but I couldn't; the quota was filled a week after they made the announcement. This is the next best thing. I'm studying their language, and you know that language reflects the basic assumptions of the people who use it. I've got a fair command of the spoken lingo already. It's not hard, really, and there are hints in it. I'm sure I'll get the answer eventually."

"More power," I said, and we went back to work.

I saw Gregori frequently from then on, and he kept me posted about his progress. He was highly excited about a month after that first meeting; said he'd got hold of a book of the Kanamit's and was trying to puzzle it out. They wrote in ideographs, worse than Chinese, but he was determined to fathom it if it took him years. He wanted my help.

WELL, I was interested in spite of myself, for I knew it would be a long job. We spent some evenings together, working with material from Kanamit bulletin-boards and so forth, and the extremely limited English-Kanamit dictionary they issued the staff. My conscience both-

ered me about the stolen book, but gradually I became absorbed by the problem. Languages are my field, after all. I couldn't help being fascinated.

We got the title worked out in a few weeks. It was "How to Serve Man," evidently a handbook they were giving out to new Kanamit members of the embassy staff. They had new ones in, all the time now, a shipload about once a month; they were opening all kinds of research laboratories, clinics and so on. If there was anybody on Earth besides Gregori who still distrusted those people, he must have been somewhere in the middle of Tibet.

It was astonishing to see the changes that had been wrought in less than a year. There were no more standing armies, no more shortages, no unemployment. When you picked up a newspaper you didn't see "H-BOMB" or "V-2" leaping out at you; the news was always good. It was a hard thing to get used to. The Kanamit were working on human biochemistry, and it was known around the embassy that they were nearly ready to announce methods of making our race taller and stronger and healthier—practically a race of supermen—and they had a potential cure for heart disease and cancer.

I didn't see Gregori for a fortnight after we finished working out the title of the book; I was on a long-overdue vacation in Canada. When I got back, I was shocked by the change in his appearance.

"What on Earth is wrong, Gregori?" I asked. "You look like the very devil."

"Come down to the lounge."

I WENT with him, and he gulped a stiff Scotch as if he needed it.

"Come on, man, what's the matter?" I urged.

"The Kanamit have put me on the passenger list for the next exchange ship," he said. "You, too, otherwise I wouldn't be talking to you."

"Well," I said, "but—"

"They're not altruists."

"What do you mean?"

"What I told you," he said. "They're not altruists."

I tried to reason with him. I pointed out they'd made Earth a paradise compared to what it was before. He only shook his head.

Then I said, "Well, what about those lie-detector tests?"

"A farce," he replied, without heat. "I said so at the time, you fool. They told the truth, though, as far as it went."

"And the book?" I demanded, annoyed. "What about that—'How to Serve Man'? That wasn't put there for you to read. They *mean* it. How do you explain that?"

"I've read the first paragraph of that book," he said. "Why do you suppose I haven't slept for a week?"

I said, "Well?" and he smiled that curious, twisted smile, as if he really wanted to cry instead.

"It's a cookbook," he said.

—DAMON KNIGHT

FLYING SAUCER CONTEST

✠ *This contest is meant to gain readers, certainly, but it is neither a stunt nor a hoax. Willy Ley, who introduces the contest, was a founding member and vice-president of the German Rocket Society in 1927; technical advisor to Fritz Lang's famous U F A science fiction film; "The Girl in the Moon"; and, since coming to this country in 1935 has devoted himself to research engineering for rocket development. His newest book, "Rockets, Missiles and Space Travel," is due at the end of 1950, and adds important data to the valuable literature he has already produced on this subject. When a recognized authority considers Flying Saucers a serious phenomenon, research of some kind is indicated.*

✠ *As magazine editors we are limited to exploration of opinion, and this we undertake in no spirit of hoax whatever. We feel, as Mr. Ley does, that "somebody, somewhere, may be hoarding an explanation that explains all. Possibly the ingenious and extremely desirable prizes offered will lure out that explanation."*

✠ *And we repeat with Mr. Ley: "What is* YOUR *theory?" Tell us in 200 words or less, basing your explanation on one of Willy Ley's three hypotheses . . . or do you have one of your own?*

RULES FOR FLYING SAUCER CONTEST

1. Your theory on Flying Saucers must be contained in a letter of 200 words or less and must be accompanied by the coupon printed below. (Kindly print your name and address.)
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3. Entries will be selected on the basis of originality, aptness to the suhject, general interest, neatness and legibility.
4. There will be a total of 40 prizes awarded in tbe order listed below. Each winner of the first three prizes will receive an additional prize of $100 if his or her answer is accompanied by a year's subscription to GALAXY *Science Fiction*. (See coupon below.)
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David Stone

TIME QUARRY

Part 2 of a 3 part serial

BY CLIFFORD D. SIMAK

It was an attractive offer. All Sutton had to do was modify an idea to live in wealth. But he had died for the truth once before!

Illustrated by David Stone

SYNOPSIS

In the 80th Century, the status quo of Earth's galactic empire must be maintained at any cost, and no human may be killed without a fearful penalty. Yet Christopher Adams, chief of the Dept. of Galactic Investigation, has learned that several men on Aldebaran XII have been killed in an impossible accident, thus breaking both supreme rules.

As Adams worries, a stranger appears and states that he is Adams' successor, returned from the future to warn him. Adams knows of only one insignificant experiment in time travel and does not believe him. The stranger says that Asher Sutton, an agent of Adams', is about to return from 61 Cygni after 20 years . . . and must be killed when he lands.

Sutton does return, the only man ever to penetrate a strange force shield around Cygni's planetary system. His return is as weird as his visit to the unapproachable star . . . the ports of his ship are smashed, there is no air aboard, nor food and water. And, odder yet, he is not breathing. He forces his lungs and heart to function, then whispers, "Johnny," and there is a comforting stir in his mind. "We are home," Sutton says. "We made it. This is my home, Johnny."

But Sutton, back at his old hotel, finds that his suite has been kept waiting for him for 20 years, and as he enters it, he is knocked out and

his mind pried into, the contents of his attache case photostated. Adams, behind the attack, receives this startling report: Sutton's ship could not be flown; Sutton has a rebuilt body with alien organs added; Sutton's attache case contains a MS in a language unknown in the galaxy.

Sutton, recovering, is visited by an android—a synthetic human—named Herkimer, who carries a challenge to a duel with Geoffrey Benton, Earth's foremost duelist. Then an android lawyer calls to explain that Buster, an old family robot, has filed a homestead on a distant planet, and has left an old trunk for Sutton. Finally, a beautiful girl, Eva Armour, makes a dinner date with Sutton, promising that they will make an evening of it. Sutton is gloomily sure they will.

Going with Eva to Zag House, where dreams are made to order, Sutton kills Benton, although shot at first. Eva hurries him out and informs him that Benton was psychologically conditioned to kill Sutton. He is bewildered by all this mysterious attention, including Eva's assurance that she is on his side and has studied him for 20 years.

The trunk arrives from Buster, the family robot, containing a queer wrench and a letter 6,000 years old, addressed to John H. Sutton, apparently a remote ancestor. Before he can open it, the android Herkimer appears and announces that Sutton has inherited him and a hunting asteroid and a small spaceship, under the dueling laws, from Benton.

Sutton reports to Adams, his old chief, that the Cygnians are not dangerous to Man . . . and that no other human will ever visit the system again. The inhabitants are not humans, not even beings, he tells Adams; they are symbiotic abstractions, forming closely joined partnerships that help each partner, like the bacteria and plants that support each other chemically. Adams, unsatisfied, promises grimly to keep in touch with Sutton.

Leaving Adams, Sutton visits Dr. Raven, his old professor in comparative religions. Dr. Raven admits to him that he has never found evidence of an actual force of destiny. Sutton states that he has. Not a new religion, not faith or a hunch, but genuine, true destiny.

Adams, meanwhile, talks by mentophone—communication at the infinite speed of thought—with an agent on Aldebaran XII. The only clue to the mysterious slayings there is a book found at the wreck, so destroyed that only "by Asher Sutton" *can be made out. A telecall from the man claiming to be Adams' future successor states that the killings on Aldebaran XII are an incident in a* war in time . . . *and Sutton is responsible for that war. He insists that Sutton be killed. Adams decides reluctantly it might be best for the status quo to liquidate Sutton.*

Driving home from Dr. Raven's office, Sutton rescues a man from a crashed ship. The man seems to recognize Sutton, makes a cryptic

sign, and, mumbling about a battle back in '83 and time-jumping, dies with a proud grin. Sutton, searching him for a clue to identity, finds a worn book: "This Is Destiny by Asher Sutton." *It is the book Sutton plans to write, but has not yet written.*

Near his hotel, Sutton is ambushed. Johnny, the entity in his mind, warns him and he escapes. But Herkimer, the android Sutton had won from Benton in the duel, appears and says anxiously that they must flee Earth. Eva Armour is waiting with Sutton's spaceship. Sutton harshly replies that he is not stupid enough to walk into another trap. Herkimer, apologizing, knocks him out.

PART TWO

XVI

SUTTON lay with his eyes tight shut and listened, heard the muted mutter of the coasting rocket tubes, sensed the walls of a ship around him, an air-filled shell hurtling through space.

"Johnny," Sutton's mind called silently. "Where are we?"

There was a gentle movement within his brain, as reassuring as a cheek laid against his own, and a voiceless voice answered:

"We're in a ship, Ash, somewhere beyond Mars."

"How many are in the ship with us?"

"The android and the girl. And they are friendly. I told you they were friendly. Why didn't you pay attention?"

"I can't trust anyone."

"Not even me?"

"Not your judgment, Johnny. You're new here."

"Not new, Ash. I know Earth and Earthmen. Much better than you know them. You're not the first Earthman I've known."

"I'm sorry. I keep forgetting."

"And we should be as one. We were before. Why has it been different lately?"

Sutton's brain squirmed guiltily. "I don't know. Things have happened. So many things."

"One mind, Ash. One mind, one body. Not two, but one. Not you, nor I. Us, singular."

Eva said: "You're awake, Ash. No use playing possum."

Sutton kept his eyes firmly shut. "You understand any of this, Johnny? This Morgan business?"

"No, Ash."

"But you see a pattern?"

"I'm beginning to."

"Then you're doing better than I am. Let me in on it."

"Not yet, Ash. You're not ready."

Eva Armour shook him. "Wake up," she said.

Sutton opened his eyes. He was lying on a bunk and the girl was shaking him and she was angry and not at all gentle. Herkimer stuck

his head out of the door of the pilot shell. "Coming around?" he asked.

"Sure," said Sutton. "I'm all right."

He swung his legs off the bunk and sat on its edge. His hand went up and felt the lump on his jaw.

"I had to hit you hard," said Herkimer regretfully. "I tried to calculate it as closely as I could. Hard enough to knock you out, not hard enough to cause any real damage."

"You should have pasted him," said Eva sharply, "with everything you had. I never saw a more exasperating person. He's been lying here awake for the last five minutes."

Herkimer squinted at the jaw with professional pride. "I do believe I got you on the button. First try, too."

The ship, Sutton saw, was small. But it was clean and comfortable and there would have been room enough for four or five on a short trip. Herkimer, talking his precise, copybook speech, had said it was small, but serviceable.

"I suppose," said Sutton, "you wouldn't consider telling me where you are taking me."

"We don't mind at all," said Eva. "We're going to an asteroid."

"The hunting asteroid," added Herkimer. "The one you won from Benton. It has a lodge and a good supply of food and it is comfortable."

"It will be pleasant," Sutton said, "to do a little hunting."

"You won't be doing any hunting," Herkimer replied.

Sutton raised his head, glanced sharply from one to the other.

"You're going to write a book," said Eva. "Surely you know about the book. The Revisionists are. . . ."

"Yes," Sutton told her.

"I know about the book—"

He stopped, remembering, and his hand went involuntarily to his breast pocket. The book was there, all right, and something that crinkled when he touched it. He remembered that, too. The incredibly old letter that John H. Sutton had forgotten to open six thousand years before.

"NO," said Eva, "we didn't rob you. We didn't even search you."

"About the book," said Sutton, and then stopped again. He had been about to say he needn't bother about writing the book, for he already had a copy. But something stopped him; he wasn't certain that it was smart just then to let them know about the copy he had.

"I brought along the case," said Herkimer. "The manuscript's all there. I checked through it."

"And plenty of paper?" asked Sutton, mocking him.

"Oh, yes. More than enough."

Eva Armour leaned toward Sutton, so close that he could smell the fragrance of her copper hair. "Don't you see," she asked, "how important it is that you write this book? Don't you understand?"

Sutton shook his head. Important, he thought. Important for what?

He remembered the mouth that death pried open, the teeth glittering in the moonlight, and the words of a dying man still ringing sharply in his ears.

"No, I don't understand," he said. "Maybe you can tell me."

She shook her head. "You write the book. That's your job."

XVII

THE asteroid was enveloped in the perpetual twilight of the far-from-Sun and its frosty peaks speared up like sharp, silvery needles stabbing at the stars.

The air was sharp and cold and thinner than on Earth and the wonder was, Sutton told himself, that any air could be kept on the place at all. Although at the cost that it had taken to make this asteroid habitable, it would seem that anything should be possible. The price of the atomic plants alone would run to the national debt of a medium-size planet, and without atomics there would be no power to run the atmosphere generators and gravity machines that supplied the air and held it in place.

Once, he thought, Man had been content—had been forced to be content—to find his solitude at a lakeshore cottage or a hunting lodge or aboard a pleasure yacht. But now, with the wealth of a galaxy to spend, Man fixed up an asteroid at a fabulous cost or bought out a solar system at a bargain price.

"There's the lodge," said Herkimer, and Sutton looked in the direction of the pointing finger. High up on the jigsaw horizon, he saw the shining metal building with its one pinpoint of light.

"What's the light?" asked Eva. "Is there someone here?"

Herkimer shrugged indifferently. "Someone forgot to turn it off when they left."

Evergreens and birches, ghostlike in the starlight, stood in ragged clumps, like marching soldiers storming the height where the lodge was set.

"The path is over here," said Herkimer.

He led the way and they climbed, with Eva in the center and Sutton bringing up the rear. The path was steep and uneven and the light was none too good, for the thin atmosphere failed to break up the starlight. The stars themselves remained tiny, steely points of light that did not blaze or twinkle, but stood primly in the sky like dots upon a map.

The lodge, Sutton saw, apparently sat upon a small plateau, and he knew that the plateau would be the work of Man. Nowhere else in all this jumbled landscape was it likely that one would find a level spot much bigger than a pocket handkerchief.

A movement of air, so faint and tenuous that it could be scarcely called a breeze, rustled down the slope and set the evergreens to moaning. Something scuttled from the

path and skittered up the rocks. From somewhere far away came a screaming sound that set Sutton's teeth on edge.

"That's an animal," Herkimer said quietly. He stopped and waved his hand at the tortured, twisted rock. "Great place to hunt," he added, "if you don't break a leg."

SUTTON looked behind him and saw for the first time the true, savage wildness of the place. A frozen whirlpool of star-speckled terrain stretched below them . . . great, yawning gulfs of blackness, above which stood brooding peaks and spirelike pinnacles.

Sutton shivered at the sight. "Let's get on," he said.

They climbed the last hundred yards and reached the Man-made plateau, then stood and stared across the nightmare landscape, and as he looked, Sutton felt the cold hand of loneliness reach down with icy fingers to take him in its grip. For here was sheer, mad loneliness such as he had never dreamed. Here was the very negation of life and motion. Here was the stark, bald beginning when there was no life, nor even thought of life. Here anything that moved was an alien thing.

A footstep crunched behind them and they swung around. A man moved out of the starry darkness. His voice was pleasant and heavy as he spoke to them: "Good evening. We heard you land and I walked out to meet you."

Eva's voice was cold and just a little angry. "We had not expected anyone to be here."

The man's tone stiffened. "I hope we are not trespassing. We are friends of Mr. Benton and he told us to use the place at our convenience."

"Mr. Benton is dead," said Eva frostily. "This man is the new owner."

The man's head turned toward Sutton. "I'm sorry, sir. We did not know. Of course, we'll leave the first moment that we can."

"I see no reason," Sutton told him, "why you should not stay."

"Mr. Sutton," said Eva, "came here for peace and quiet. He expects to write a book."

"A book," the man repeated. "An author, eh?"

Sutton had the uncomfortable feeling that the man was laughing, not at him alone, but at the three of them.

"Sutton?" asked the man, apparently thinking hard. "I don't seem to recall the name. But, then, I'm not a great reader."

"I've never written anything before," explained Sutton.

"Oh, well," said the man, laughing as if he were relieved, "that explains it."

"It's cold out here," Herkimer said abruptly. "Let us get indoors."

"Certainly," said the man. "Yes, it is cold, although I hadn't noticed it. By the way, my name is Pringle. My partner's name is Case."

No one answered him and after a few seconds he turned around and trotted ahead of them, leading the way.

The lodge, Sutton saw as they approached it, was larger than it had seemed from the valley where they had brought the ship in. It loomed huge against the starlit backdrop. If one had not known that it was there, it might have been mistaken for an odd rock formation.

The door opened as their feet sounded on the massive stone steps which led up to it. Another man stood there, stiff and erect and tall, thin, but with whipcord strength about him, as the light from inside the room outlined his figure harshly.

"The new owner, Case," said Pringle, and it seemed to Sutton that he emphasized the words just a bit too much. As if he meant his tone to be a warning.

"Benton died, you know," said Pringle, and Case answered: "Oh, did he? How peculiar."

Which, Sutton thought, was a funny thing to say.

Case stood to one side to let them enter, then pulled shut the door.

The room was immense, with only one lamp burning, and shadows pressed in upon them out of the dark corners and the cavernous arch of the raftered ceiling.

"I am afraid," said Pringle, "that you'll have to look out for yourselves. Case and I are roughing it and we brought along no robots, although I can fix up something if you happen to be hungry. A hot drink, perhaps, and some sandwiches?"

"WE ATE just before we landed," Eva said, "and Herkimer will take care of what few things we have."

"Then take a chair," urged Pringle. "That one over there is comfortable. We can talk a bit."

"Not right now, thanks. The trip was just a little rough."

"You're an ungracious young lady," Pringle said, and his words were halfway between jest and anger.

"I'm a tired young lady."

Pringle walked to a wall, flipped up toggles. Lights sprang into being. "The bedrooms are upstairs," he said. "Off the balcony. Case and I have the first and second to the left. Take your pick from any of the rest."

He moved forward to lead them up the stairs. But Case spoke up and Pringle stopped and waited, one hand on the lower curve of the stair rail.

"Mr. Sutton," said Case, "it seems to me I have heard your name somewhere."

"I don't think so," said Sutton. "I'm a very unimportant person."

"But you killed Benton."

"No one said I killed him."

Case did not laugh, but his voice said that if he had not been Case, he would have. "Nevertheless, you must have killed him. I happen to know that is the only way anyone

could get this asteroid. Benton loved it and this side of life he'd never give it up."

"Since you insist, then I did kill Benton."

Case shook his head, awed. "Remarkable," he said. "Absolutely remarkable."

"Good night, Mr. Case," said Eva, and then turned to Pringle. "No need to trouble you. We will find our way."

"No trouble," Pringle rumbled back. "No trouble at all." And, once again, he was laughing at them.

He jogged lightly up the stairs.

XVIII

THERE was something wrong about Pringle and Case. The very fact that they were here, at the lodge, was sinister.

There had been mockery in Pringle's voice. He had been laughing at them all the time, laughing with a sneering amusement, enjoying some thinly varnished joke that they did not know.

Pringle was a talker, a buffoon . . . but Case was stiff and straight and correct, and when he spoke his words were clipped and sharp. There was something about Case . . . some point . . . some resemblance to something that escaped Sutton at the moment.

Sitting on the edge of his bed, Sutton frowned.

If I could just remember, he told himself. If I could put my finger on that mannerism, on the way he talks and walks and holds himself erect. If I could associate that with a certain thing I can't identify, it would explain a lot. It might tell me who Case is, or what he is, or even why he's here.

Case knew that I killed Benton. Case knows who I am. And he should have kept his mouth shut, but he had to let me know he knew, because that way he bolstered up his ego and even if he doesn't look it, his ego may need boosting.

Eva didn't trust them, either, for she tried to tell me something when we parted at her door. I couldn't quite make out what it was from the way she moved her lips, although it looked like she was trying to say: "Don't trust them."

As if I would trust anyone . . . *anyone at all.*

Sutton wiggled his toes and stared at them, fascinated. He tried to wiggle them in series and they wouldn't wiggle that way. He tried to match the wiggling of each toe on each foot and they wouldn't match.

I can't even control my own body, he thought, and it was a funny thing to think.

Pringle and Case were waiting for us, Sutton told himself, and wondered even as he said it if he might not be giving himself over to sheer imagery. For how could they be waiting when they could not have known that Herkimer and Eva would head for the asteroid?

He shook his head, but the belief that the two had been waiting for them stayed . . .

After all, it was not so strange. Adams had known that he was coming back to Earth, returning home after twenty years. Adams knew and set a trap for him . . . and there was no way, absolutely no way that Adams could have known.

Why had Adams set the trap?

Why had Buster run away to homestead a planet?

Why had someone conditioned Benton to kill Sutton?

Why had three men been waiting for Sutton when he came back to the Orion Arms?

Why had Eva and Herkimer brought him to the asteroid?

To write a book, they had said.

But the book was written.

The book . . .

He reached for his coat, which hung from the back of a chair. From it, he took out the gold-lettered copy of the book and as he pulled it out, the letter came with it and fell upon the carpet. He picked the letter up and put it on the bed beside him and opened the book to the flyleaf.

"THIS IS DESTINY," it said, *"By Asher Sutton."*

Underneath the title, at the very bottom of the page, was a line of fine print. Sutton had to hold the book a little closer so that he could read it:

Original Version

And that was all. No date of publication. No marks of copyright. No publisher's imprint. Just the title and the author and the line of print that said *Original Version.*

As if, he thought . . . as if the book were so well known, so firm a fixture in the lives of everyone, that anything other than the title and the author would be superfluous.

HE TURNED two pages and they were blank, and then another page, and the text began:

We are not alone.
No one ever is alone.
Not since the first faint stirring of the first flicker of life, on the first planet in the galaxy that knew the quickening of sentiency, has there ever been a single entity that walked or crawled or slithered down the path of life alone.

And that was it, he thought. That is the way I mean to write it.

That was the way I wrote it.

For I must have written it. Sometime, somewhere, I must have written it, for I hold it in my hands.

He closed the book and put it back carefully in the pocket and hung the coat back on the chair.

I must not read it, he told himself. I must not read and know the way that it will go, for then I would write the way that I had read it, and I must not do that. I must write it the way I know it is, the way I plan to write it. I must be honest, for

someday the race of Man . . . and the races of other things as well . . . may know the book and read it and every word must be exactly so, and I must write so well and so simply that all can understand.

He threw back the covers of the bed and lay down, and as he did, he saw the letter and picked it up.

With a steady finger, he inserted his nail beneath the flap and ran it along the edge and the mucilage dissolved in a brittle shower of powder. He took the letter out and unfolded it carefully, so that it would not break and saw that it was typewritten, with many mistakes that were X'd out, as if the man who wrote it had found a typewriter an unhandy thing to use.

Sutton rolled over on one side and held the paper under the lamp and read the living words of a man 6,000 years dead.

XIX

Bridgeport, Wis.,
July 11, 1987

I WRITE this letter to myself, so that the postmark may prove beyond controversy the day and year that it was written. I shall not open it, but shall place it among my effects against the day when someone —a far-distant member of my own family, God willing—may open it and read. And reading, know the thing that I believe and think, but dare not say while I am still alive, lest someone call me touched.

For I have not long to live. I have lasted more than a man's average span and while I still am hale and hearty, I know full well the hand of time may miss a man at one reaping, and get him at the next. Hence, I hasten to introduce myself and the mystery I have come to know.

My name is John H. Sutton and I am a member of a numerous family which had its roots in the east, but one branch of which situated in this locality about one hundred years ago. I must ask, if the reader of this be unacquainted with the Suttons, that my word be taken at face value without substantiating proof. However, I would like to state that we Suttons are a sober lot and not given to jokes, and that our reputation for integrity and honesty is singularly unquestioned.

While I was educated for the law, I soon found it not entirely to my liking and for the last forty years or more have followed the occupation of farming, finding more contentment in it than I ever found in law. For farming is an honest and a soul-warming job that gives one contact with the first essentials of living.

For the past number of years I have not been physically able to continue with the more strenuous labor of the farm, but pride myself that I still do most of the chores and still hold active management, which means that I am in the habit of mak-

ing regular tours of the acres to see how things are coming.

Of late years, as my step has slowed and I have found exertion tiring, I have fallen into the habit of arbitrarily setting for myself certain places of rest during my inspection of the farm. One spot has always had, from the very first, a sense of the special for me. If I were still a child, I might best explain it by saying that it seems to be an enchanted place.

It is a deep cleft in the bluff that runs down to the river valley and it is located at the north end of the high pasture. There is a fair-sized boulder at the top of the cleft, and this boulder is shaped appropriately for sitting, which may be one of the reasons why I like it, for I am a man who takes to comfort.

From the boulder one may see the sweep of the river valley with a stressed third-dimensional quality, due no doubt to the height of the vantage point plus the clearness of the air, although at times the whole scene is enveloped with a blue mist of particularly tantalizing and lucid clarity.

IT IS as if the place were tingling . . . waiting for something to happen . . . as if that one particular spot held great possibilities for drama or for revelation. There, on that one area of Earth, something could or might happen which could happen nowhere else on the entire planet. I have, at times, tried to imagine what that happening might be, and I shrink from telling some of the possibilities that I have imagined, although, in truth, in other things I am perhaps not imaginative enough.

To approach the boulder, I cut across the lower end of the bluff pasture, a place which is often in better grass than the rest of the grazing area, for the cattle, for some reason, do not often venture there. The pasture ends in a thin growth of trees, the forerunners of the mass of foliage which sweeps down the bluff side. Just a few rods inside the trees is the boulder, and because of the trees the boulder is always shaded, no matter what the time of the day, but the view is unobstructed because of the rapid shelving of the ground.

One day about ten years ago—July 4, 1977, to be exact—I approached this place and found a man and a strange machine at the lower end of the pasture, just clear of the trees.

I say machine, because that is what it appeared to be, although, to tell the truth, I could not make too much of it. It was like an egg, pointed slightly at each end, as an egg might look if someone stepped on it and did not break it, but spread it out, so that the ends became more pronounced. It had no working parts outside and so far as I could see not even a window, yet it was apparent that the operator of it sat inside.

For the man had what appeared to be a door open and was standing

outside and working at what may have been the motor, although, when I ventured a look, it appeared like no motor I had ever seen before. The fact is that I never did get a good look at the motor or at anything else about the contraption. The man, as soon as he saw me, adroitly maneuvered me away from it and engaged me in such pleasant and intelligent conversation that I could not, without rudeness, change the subject long enough to pay attention to all the things that stirred my curiosity. I remember now, thinking back, that there were many things which I wanted to ask him, but which I never got around to, and it seems to me now that he must have anticipated these very questions and deliberately and skillfully steered me away from them.

The plain truth is that he never did tell me who he was or where he came from or why he happened to be in my pasture. And while that may seem rude to the reader of this account, it did not seem rude at the time, for he was such a charming person.

He seemed well informed on farming, although he looked like no farmer. Come to think of it, I do not remember exactly what he did look like, only that he was dressed in a way which I had never seen before. Not garishly, nor outlandishly, nor even in such a manner that one would think of him as foreign, but in clothing which had certain subtle differences difficult to pin down.

He complimented me on the good growth of the pasture grass and asked me how many head of cattle we ran there and how many we were milking and what was the most satisfactory manner we had found to finish off good beef. I answered him as best I could, being very interested in his line of talk, and he kept the conversation going with appropriate comment and questions, some of which I now realize were meant as subtle flattery, although at the time I did not think so.

HE HAD a tool of some sort in his hand and now he waved it at a field of corn across the fence and said it looked like a good stand and asked me if I thought it would be knee high by the Fourth. I told him that today was the Fourth and that it was a mite better than knee high and that I was very pleased with it, since it was a new brand of seed that I was trying for the first time. He looked a little taken aback and laughed and said, "So it's the Fourth," and that he had been so busy lately he had got his dates mixed. And then, before I could even wonder how a man could get his dates so mixed that he could miss the Fourth of July, he was off again on another tack.

He asked how long I had lived here and when I told him, he asked if the family hadn't been here a long time; somewhere, he said, he had heard the name before. So I told him that we had and before I knew

it, he had me telling all about the family, including some anecdotes which we usually do not tell outside the family circle, since they are not exactly the kind of stories that we would care to have known about ourselves. For while our family is conservative and honorable in the main and better in most things than many others, there is no family which does not have a skeleton or two to hide away from view.

We talked until it was long past the dinner hour and when I noticed this, I asked him if he would not take the meal with us, but he thanked me and said that in just a short while he would have the trouble fixed and would be on his way. He said that he had virtually completed whatever repair was needed when I had appeared. I apologized for delaying him, but he assured me that he did not mind at all, that it had been pleasant to spend the time with me.

As I left him, I managed to get in one question. I had been intrigued by the tool which he had held in his hand during our conversation and I asked him what it was. He showed it to me and told me it was a wrench, and it did look something like a wrench, although not very much so.

After I had eaten dinner and had a nap, I walked back to the pasture, determined to ask the stranger some of the questions which I realized, by this time, he had avoided.

The machine was gone and the stranger, too, with only a print in the pasture grass to show where the machine had stood. But the wrench was there and when I bent to pick it up, I saw that one end was discolored and upon investigation I found that the discoloration was blood. I have, many times since, berated myself for not having had an analysis made to determine whether the blood was human or from some animal.

Likewise, I have wondered many times just what happened there. Who the man was and how he came to leave the wrench and why the heavier end of the wrench was stained with blood.

I still make the boulder one of my regular stops and the boulder still is always in the shade and the view still is unobstructed and the air over the river valley still lends to the scene its strangely deep three-dimensional effect. And the sense of tingling expectancy still hangs above the spot, so I know that the place had not been waiting for this one strange happening alone, but that other strange happenings still may occur. I do not hope nor expect that I shall see another, for the life of man is but a second in comparison with the time of planets.

THE wrench which I picked up is still with us and it has proved a very useful tool. As a matter of fact, we have dispensed with most of our other tools and use it almost alone, since it will adjust itself to almost any nut or stud or will hold a shaft of almost any size from turning. There is no need of adjustment,

nor is there any adjustment device that can be found. One simply applies it to whatever piece of metal one wants to take a grip upon and the tool adjusts itself. No great amount of pressure or strength is needed to operate the wrench. It appears to have the tendency to take whatever slight pressure one exerts upon it and multiply that pressure to the exact point needed.

However, we are very careful to use the wrench only when there are no outside eyes to see it, for it smacks too much of magic or of witchcraft to be allowed on public view. The general knowledge that we possessed such a wrench almost certainly would lead to unwholesome speculation among our neighbors. And since we are an honest and respectable family, such a situation is the furthest from our wish.

NONE of us ever talk about the man and the machine I found in the bluff pasture, even among ourselves. We seem tactfully to recognize that it is a subject which does not befit sober farmers.

But while we do not talk about it, I do know that I, myself, think about it much. I spend more time than usual at the boulder resting place, just why, I do not know, unless it is in the feeble hope that somehow I may find a clue which either will substantiate or disprove the theory I have formed to account for the happening.

For I believe, without proof of any sort, that the man was a man who came from time and that the machine was a time machine and the wrench is a tool which will not be discovered nor manufactured for more years to come than I might possibly guess.

I believe that somewhere in the future, Man has discovered a method by which he moves through time and that undoubtedly he has evolved a very rigid code of ethics and practices, in order to prevent the paradoxes which would result from indiscriminate time traveling or meddling in the affairs of other times.

I believe that the leaving of the wrench in my time provides one of those paradoxes which in itself is simple, but which under certain circumstances might lead to many complications. For that reason, I have impressed upon the family the strict necessity of keeping it secret.

Likewise, I have come to the conclusion—also unsupported—that the cleft, at the head of which the boulder is located, may be a road through time, or at least part of a road, a single point where our present time coincides very closely through the operation of some as-yet-unknown principle with another time far removed from us. It may be a place in space-time where less resistance is encountered in traveling through time than in other places, and, having been discovered, is used quite frequently. Or it may simply be that it is a time road more deeply rutted, more frequently used than many

other time roads, with the result that whatever medium separates one time from another time had been worn thin, or had bulged a bit, or whatever would happen under such a circumstance.

That reasoning might explain the strange eerie tingling of the place, the sense of expectancy.

The reader must bear in mind, of course, that I am an old, old man, that I have outlived the ordinary span of human life and that I continue to exist through some quirk of human destiny. While it does not seem so to myself, it may be that my mind is not as sharp or keen nor as analytical as it may once have been, and that as a result I am susceptible to ideas which would be rejected by a younger person.

The one bit of proof, if one may call it proof, that I have to support my theories is that the man I met could well have been a future man, might well have sprung from some civilization further advanced than ours. For it must be apparent to whoever reads this letter that in my talk with him he used me for his own purpose, that he pulled the wool over my eyes as easily as a man of my day might pull it over the eyes of a Homeric Greek or some member of Attila's tribe. He was, I am sure, a man versed in semantics and in psychology. Certainly, he always was one long jump ahead of me.

I write this now only so that my theories, which I shrink from telling in my lifetime, may not be wholly lost, but may be available at some future time when a more enlightened knowledge than we have today may be able to make something out of them. And I hope that, reading them, one will not laugh, since I am dead. For if one did laugh, I am afraid that, dead as I might be, I would surely know it.

THAT is the failing of us Suttons —we cannot bear to be made the butt of laughter.

And in case one may believe that my mind is twisted, I herewith enclose a physician's certificate, signed just three days ago, asserting that upon examination he found me sound of body and mind.

But the story I have to tell is not yet entirely done. These additional events should have been included in earlier sequence, but I found no place in which they logically would fit.

They concern the strange incident of the stolen clothing and the coming of William Jones.

The clothing was stolen a few days after the incident in the high pasture. Martha had done the washing early in the day, before the heat of the summer sun, and hung it on the line. When she went to take in the clothes, she found that an old pair of overalls of mine, a shirt belonging to Roland and a couple pair of socks, the ownership of which I fear I have forgotten, had disappeared.

The theft made quite a stir among

us, for thievery is a thing which does not often happen in our community. We talked about it off and on for several days, and finally agreed that the theft must have been the work of some passing tramp. Even that explanation was scarcely satisfactory. We are off the beaten way and tramps do not often pass, and that year, as I remember it, was a year of great prosperity and there were few tramps.

It was two weeks or so after the theft of the clothing that William Jones came to the house and asked if we might need a hand to help with the harvest. We were glad to take him on, for we were short of help and the wages that he asked were far below the going pay. We took him on for the harvest only, but he proved so capable that we have kept him all of ten years. Even as I write this, he is out in the barnyard readying the binder for the small grain cutting.

There is a funny thing about William Jones. In this country a man soon acquires a nickname or at least a variation of his own. But William Jones always has been William Jones. He never has been Will or Bill or Willie. Nor has he been Spike or Bub or Kid. Not even Jonesy. There is a quiet dignity about him that makes everyone respect him, and his love of work and his quiet, intelligent interest in farming raise him far above the usual status of a hired hand in the community.

He never drinks, a thing for which I am thankful, although at one time I had my misgivings. For when he came to us, he had a bandage on his head and he explained to me, shamefacedly, that he had been hurt in a tavern brawl across the river somewhere in Crawford County.

I don't know when it was that I began to wonder about William Jones. Certainly it was not at first, for I accepted him for what he pretended to be, a man looking for work. If there was any resemblance to the man I had talked with down in the pasture, I did not notice it then. And, now, having seen it at this late date, I wonder if my imagination, running riot with my theories of time travel, may not have conditioned me to a point where I see a mystery crouching back of every tree.

But the conviction has grown upon me through the years I have associated with him. For all that he tries to keep his place, attempts to adapt his idiom to match our idiom, there are times when his speech hints at an education and an understanding one would not expect to find in a man who works on a farm for $75 a month and board.

THERE, too, is his natural shyness, which is a thing one would expect to find if a man were deliberately attempting to adapt himself to a society that was not his own.

And there is the matter of the clothes. Thinking back, I can't be sure about the overalls, for all over-

alls look alike. But the shirt was exactly like the shirt that had been stolen from the line, although I tell myself that it would not be improbable for two men to own the same kind of shirt. And he was barefooted, which seemed a funny thing even at the time, but he explained it by saying that he had been down on his luck and I remember I advanced him enough money to buy some shoes and socks. But it turned out that he didn't need the socks, for he had two pair in his pocket.

A few years ago I decided several times that I would speak to him about the matter, but each time my resolution failed and now I know I never will. For I like William Jones and William Jones likes me and I would not for the world destroy that mutual liking by a question that might send him fleeing from the farm.

There is yet one other thing which goes to make William Jones unlike most farm hands. With his first money from his work here, he bought a typewriter and during the first two or three years that he was with us, he spent long hours of his evenings in his room using the typewriter and tramping about the room, as a man who is thinking is apt to walk.

And then one day, in the early morning, before the rest of us had gotten from our beds, he took a great sheaf of paper, apparently the result of those long hours of work, and burned it. Watching from my bedroom window, I watched him do it and he stayed until he was sure that the last scrap of the paper had been burned. Then he turned around and walked back slowly to the house.

I never mentioned to him the burning of the paper, for I felt, somehow, that it was something he did not wish another man to know.

I might go on for many pages and write down many other inconsequential, trivial things which rattle in my skull, but they would not add one iota of actual information, and might, in fact, convince the reader that I am in my dotage..

To whom this letter may reach, I wish to make one last assurance. While my theory may be wrong, I would have him or her believe that the facts I have told are true. I would have him or her know that I did see a strange machine in the high pasture and that I did talk with a strange man, that I picked up a wrench with blood upon it, that clothes were stolen from the wash line and that even now a man named William Jones is pumping himself a drink of water at the well, for the day is very hot.

Sincerely,
John H. Sutton

XX

ASHER SUTTON folded the letter and the crackling of the old paper rippled across the quietness of

the room unlike a spiteful snarl of thunder.

Then he recalled something and unfolded the sheaf of leaves again and found the thing that had been mentioned. It was yellow and old . . . not as good a quality of paper as the letter had been written on. The writing was by hand, with ink, and the lines were faded so they hardly could be read. The date was unclear, except for the final 7.

Sutton puzzled it out:

John H. Sutton today has been examined by me and I find him sound of mind and body.

The signature was a scrawl that probably could not have been read even when the ink was scarcely dry, but there were two letters that stood out fairly clearly at the very end.

The letters were *M. D.*

Sutton stared across the room and saw in his mind the scene of that long gone day.

"Doctor, I've a mind to make a will. Wonder if you could . . ."

For John H. Sutton never would have told the doctor the real reason for that slip of paper . . . the real reason why he wanted it established that he was not insane.

Sutton could imagine him. Ponderous in his walk, slow, deliberate, taking plenty of time to think things over, placing vast values on qualities and fictions which even in that day were shopworn and losing caste from centuries of over-glorification.

An old tyrant to his family, more likely. A fuddy-duddy among his neighbors, who laughed behind his back. A man lacking in humor and crinkling his brow over fine matters of etiquette and ethics.

He had been trained for the law and he had a lawyer's mind; that much, at least, the letter told with clarity. A lawyer's mind for detail, and a landed man's quality of slowness, and an old man's garrulity.

But there was no mistaking John Sutton's sincerity. He believed he had seen a strange machine and had talked with a strange man and had picked up a wrench stained with . . .

A wrench!

Sutton sat upright on the bed.

THE wrench had been in the trunk. He had held it in his hand. He had picked it up and tossed it on the pile of junk.

Sutton's hand trembled as he slid the letter back into its envelope. First it had been the stamp that had intrigued him, a stamp that was worth Lord knew how much . . . then it was the letter itself and the mystery of its being sealed . . . and now there was the wrench. And the wrench clinched everything.

For the wrench meant that there actually had been a strange machine and a stranger man . . . a man who knew enough semantics and psychology to talk a talkative, self-centered oldster off his mental feet. Fast enough on the uptake to keep this inspection-tripping farmer from ask-

ing him the very questions the man was bubbling to ask.

Who are you and where did you come from and what's that machine and how does it run and I never saw the like of it before . . .

Hard to answer, if they were ever asked.

They were not asked.

But Asher Sutton chuckled, thinking of John H. Sutton's having the last word and how it had come about. It would please the old boy if he could only know, but, of course, he couldn't.

There had been some slip, naturally. The letter had been lost or mislaid . . . and finally, somehow, it had come into the hands of another Sutton, 6,000 years removed.

And Asher Sutton was the only Sutton for whom the letter would have done a bit of good. For the letter tied in someplace, had some significance in the mystery that involved him.

Men who traveled in time. Men whose time machines went haywire and came to landfall or timefall, whichever you might call it, in a cow pasture. And other men who fought in time and screamed through folds of time in burning ships and crashed in a swamp.

A battle back in '83, the dying youth had said. Not a battle at Waterloo or off the Martian orbit, but back in '83. And the man had cried his name just before he died and lifted himself to make a sign with strangely twisted fingers.

So I am known, thought Sutton, up in '83 and beyond '83, for the boy said back and that means that, in his time, a time three centuries yet to come is historically the past.

Sutton reached for his coat again and slid the letter into the pocket with the book, then rolled out of bed. He reached for his clothes and began to dress.

Pringle and Case had used a spaceship to get to the asteroid. Sutton had to find that ship.

XXI

THE lodge was deserted, big and empty with an alienness in its emptiness that made Sutton, who should have been accustomed to alienness, shiver as he felt it touch him.

He stood for a moment outside his door and listened to the whispering of the place, the faint, illogical breathing of the house, the creak of frost-expanded walls, the caress of wind against a windowpane, and the noises that could not be explained by either frost or wind, the living sound of something that is not alive.

The carpeting in the hall deadened his footsteps as he went down it toward the stairs. Snores came from one of the two rooms which Pringle had said that he and Case occupied, and Sutton wondered for a moment which one of them it was that snored.

He went carefully down the stairs, trailing his hand along the bannister

to guide him. When he reached the massive living space, he waited, standing motionless so that his eyes might become accustomed to the deeper dark that crouched there like lairing animals.

Slowly the animals took the shapes of chairs and couches, tables, cabinets and cases. One of the chairs, he saw, had a man sitting in it.

As if he had become aware that Sutton had seen him, the man stirred, turning his face toward him. And although it was too dark to see his features, Sutton knew that the man in the chair was Case.

Then, he thought, the man who snores is Pringle, although he knew it made no difference which it was.

"SO, Mr. Sutton," Case said slowly, "you decided to go out and try to find our ship."

"Yes," Sutton said, "I did."

"Now that is fine," said Case. "That is the way I like a man to speak up and say what's on his mind." He sighed. "You meet so many devious persons, so many people who try to lie to you, so many people who tell you half truths and feel, while they're doing it, that they are being clever."

He rose out of the chair, tall and straight and prim.

"Mr. Sutton," he said, "I like you very much."

Sutton felt like grinning at the absurdity of the situation, but a coldness and a half anger in him told him this was no laughing matter.

Footsteps padded softly down the stairs behind him and Pringle's voice whispered through the room: "So he decided to make a try for it."

"As you see," said Case.

"I told you that he would," said Pringle, almost triumphantly. "I told you that he would get it figured out."

Sutton choked down the gorge that rose into his throat. But the anger held, anger at the way they talked about him as if he weren't there.

"I fear," said Case to Sutton, "that we have disturbed you. We are most untactful people and you are sensitive. But let's forget it all and get down to business now. You wanted, I believe, to ferret out our ship."

Sutton shrugged his shoulders. "That's out now, isn't it?"

"Oh, but you misunderstand," said Case. "We have no objection. Go ahead and ferret."

"Meaning I can't find it?"

"Meaning that you can," said Case. "We didn't try to hide it."

"We'll even show you the way," said Pringle. "We'll go along with you. It will take you a lot less time."

Sutton felt a fine ooze of perspiration break out along his hairline.

A trap, he told himself. A trap laid out in plain sight and not even baited. And he'd walked into it without even looking.

But it was too late now. There was no backing out.

He tried to make his voice sound unconcerned.

"All right," he said. "I'll gamble with you."

XXII

THE ship was strange, but very real. And it was the only thing that was. All the rest of the situation had a vague, unrealistic, almost fairy character about it, as if it might be a bad dream and Sutton would wake up and for an agonizing moment try to distinguish between dream and reality.

"That map over there," said Pringle, "puzzles you, no doubt. There is every reason that it should. It is a time map." He chuckled and rubbed the back of his head with a beefy hand. "Tell the truth, I don't understand the thing myself. Case does. Case is a military man and I'm just a propagandist. A propagandist doesn't have to know what he is talking about, just so he talks convincingly. But a military man does. A military man has to know; some day his life may depend on knowing."

So that was it, thought Sutton. That was the thing that had bothered him, the clue that he had told himself would explain Case, who he was and what he was and why he was here on this asteroid.

A military man.

I should have guessed, Sutton said to himself. But I was thinking in the present . . . not the past or future. And there are no military men, as such, in the world today. Although there were military men before my time and apparently there will be military men in ages yet to come.

He said to Case: "War in four dimensions must be slightly complicated."

And he didn't say it because he was interested at the moment in war, either in three or four dimensions, but because he felt that it was his turn to talk, his turn to keep this Mad Hatter tea chatter going at its proper senseless pace.

For that was what it was, he told himself . . . an utterly illogical situation, a madcap, slightly psychotic interlude that might have its purpose, but hidden and tangled in confusion.

The time has come, the Walrus said, to talk of many things, of sealing wax and sailing ships, of cabbages and . . .

Case smiled when he spoke to him, a tight, hard, clipped military smile.

"Primarily," Case said, "it is a matter of charts and graphs and very special knowledge and some superguessing. You figure out where the enemy may be and what he may be thinking and you get there first."

Sutton shrugged. "Basically that always was the principle," he said. "You got there fustest . . ."

"Ah," said Pringle, "but there are now so many more places where the enemy may go."

"You work with thought graphs and attitude charts and historic reports," said Case, almost as if he had not been interrupted. "You trace back certain happenings and then you return and try to change some

of those happenings . . . just a little, you understand, for you must not change them much. Only enough so the end result is slightly different, just a little less favorable to the enemy. One change here and another there and you have him on the run."

"It drives you nuts," said Pringle confidentially. "Because you must be sure, you see. You pick out a nice juicy historic trend and you figure it out to the finest detail and you pick a key point where change is indicated, so you go back and change it . . ."

"AND then," said Case, "it kicks you in the face."

"Because, you understand," explained Pringle, "the historian was wrong. Some of his material was wrong or his method was clumsy or his reasoning was off . . ."

"Somewhere along the line," said Case, "he missed a factor."

"That's right," said Pringle, "somewhere he missed a factor and you find, after you have changed it, that it affects your side more than it does your enemy's."

"Now, Mr. Bones," said Sutton, his face straight, "I wonder if you could tell me why a chicken runs across the road."

"Yes, Mr. Interlocutor," said Pringle, also without a smile. "Because it wants to get on the other side."

Cartoon stuff, thought Sutton. A scene jerked raw and bleeding from a crazy humorist's routine.

But clever. Pringle was a propagandist and he was no fool. He knew semantics and he knew psychology. He knew all there was to know about the human race, so far as that knowledge could serve his sinister unknown purpose.

A man had landed in the high pasture one morning, 6,000 years before, and John H. Sutton, Esq., had come ambling down the hill, swinging a stick, for he was the sort of man who would have carried a stick —a stout, strong hickory stick, no doubt, cut and trimmed with his own jackknife. And the man had talked with him and had used the same kind of mental tactics on John H. Sutton as Pringle now was trying to use on Sutton's far descendant.

Go ahead, said Sutton to himself. Talk yourself hoarse in the throat and dry in the tongue. And pretty soon we'll get down to business.

As if he had read Sutton's thoughts, Case said to Pringle: "Jake, it isn't working out."

"No, I guess it ain't," said Pringle.

"Let's sit down," said Case.

Sutton felt a flood of relief. Now, he told himself, he would find out what the others wanted, might get some clue to what was going on.

He sat down in a pressure chair, and from where he sat he could see the front end of the spaceship's cabin, a tiny living space that shrieked efficiency. The control board canted in front of the pilot's chair, but there were few controls. A row of buttons, lever or two, a panel of

toggles that probably controlled lights and ports and such . . . and that was all. Efficient and simple, no foolishness, a minimum of manual controls. The ship, Sutton thought, must almost fly itself.

Case slid down into a chair and crossed his long legs, stretching them out in front of him, sitting on his backbone. Pringle perched on a chair's edge, leaning forward, rubbing hairy hands.

"Sutton," asked Case, "what is it that you want?"

"Not a thing," said Sutton. "Not a single thing."

"But that's foolish," Pringle protested. "There must be something you want."

"A little information, maybe."

"Like what?"

"Like what this is all about."

"You're going to write a book," said Case.

"Yes," said Sutton. "I intend to write a book."

"And you want to sell that book."

"I hope to see it published."

"A BOOK," Case pointed out, "is a commodity. It's a product of brain and muscle. It has a market value."

"I suppose," said Sutton, "that you are in the market."

"We are publishers," said Case, "looking for a book."

"A best seller," Pringle added.

Case uncrossed his legs, hitched himself higher in the chair. "It's all quite simple," he said. "Just a business deal. We wish you would set your price."

"Make it high," urged Pringle. "We are prepared to pay."

"I have no price in mind," said Sutton.

"We had discussed it," Case told him, "in a rather speculative manner, wondering how much you might want and how much we might be willing to give. We figured a planet might be attractive to you."

"We'd make it a dozen planets," Pringle said, "but that doesn't make sense. What would a man do with a dozen planets?"

"He might rent them out," said Sutton.

"You mean," asked Case, "that you might be interested in a dozen planets?"

"No, I wouldn't," Sutton answered. "Pringle wondered what a man would do with a dozen planets and I was being helpful. I said . . ."

Pringle leaned so far forward in his chair that he was almost off it. "Look, we aren't talking about one of the backwoods planets out at the tail end of nowhere. We're offering you a landscaped planet, free of all venomous and hostile life, with a salubrious climate and tractable natives and all the customary living accommodations and improvements."

"And the money," said Case, "to keep it running for the rest of your life."

"Right spang in the middle of the galaxy," said Pringle. "It's an address you wouldn't be ashamed of."

"I'm not interested," said Sutton.

Case's temper cracked. "Good Lord, what is it that you want?"

"I want information," Sutton said.

Case sighed. "All right, then. We'll give you information."

"Why do you want my book?"

"There are three parties interested in your book," said Case. "One of those parties would kill you to prevent your writing it. What is more to the point, they probably will if you don't throw in with us."

"And the third party?"

"The third party wants you to write the book, all right, but they won't pay you a thing for doing it. They'll do all they can to make it easy for you to write the book and they'll try to protect you from the ones that would like to kill you, but they're not offering any money."

"If I took you up," said Sutton, "I suppose you'd help me write the book? Conferences and so forth?"

"Naturally," said Case. "We'd have an interest in it. We'd want it done the best way possible."

"After all," said Pringle, "our interest would be as great as yours."

"That's what I thought," Sutton told them. "My book is not for sale."

"We'd boost the ante some," said Pringle.

"It still is not for sale."

"That's your final word?" asked Case. "Your considered opinion?"

Sutton nodded.

Case sighed. "Then," he said, "I guess we have to kill you."

He took a gun out of his pocket.

XXIII

THE psych-tracer ticked on, endlessly, running fast, then slow, skipping a beat now and then, like the erratic time measurement of a clock with hiccoughs.

It was the only sound in the room and to Adams it seemed as if he were listening to the beating of a heart, the breathing of a man, the throb of blood along the jugular vein.

He grimaced at the pile of dossiers which a moment before he had swept from his desk onto the floor with an angry sweep of his hand. For there was nothing in them . . . absolutely nothing. Every one was perfect, every one checked. Birth certificates, scholastic records, recommendations, loyalty checks, psych examinations, all of them were as they should be. There was not a single flaw.

That was the trouble . . . in all the records of the Service's personnel, there was not a single flaw. Not a thing a man could point to. Not a thing on which one could anchor suspicion.

Lily white and pure.

Yet someone inside the Service had stolen Sutton's dossier. Someone had tipped off Sutton on the gun-trap laid for him at the Orion Arms. Someone had been ready and waiting, knowing of the trap, to whisk him out of reach.

"Spies," said Adams to himself, and he made his hand into a fist and

hit the desk so hard that his knuckles stung.

For no one but an insider could have made away with Sutton's dossier. No one but an insider could have known of the decision to destroy Sutton, nor of the three men who had been assigned to carry out the order.

Adams smiled grimly.

The tracer chuckled at him. *Ker-up,* it said, *ker-up, clickity, click, ker-up.*

That was Sutton's heart and breath . . . Sutton's life ticking away somewhere. So long as Sutton lived, no matter where he was or what he might be doing, the tracer would go on chuckling and burping.

Ker-rup, ker-rup, ker-rup . . .

Somewhere in the asteroid belt, the tracer had said, and that was a very general location, but it could be narrowed. Already ships with other tracers aboard were narrowing it down. Sooner or later, hours or days or weeks, Sutton would be found.

Ker-rup . . .

War, the man in the mask had said.

And hours later, a ship had come screaming down across the hills, like a blazing comet, to plunge into a swamp.

A ship such as no man as yet had made, carrying melted weapons that were unlike any that Man had yet invented. A ship whose thunder in the night had roused the sleeping inhabitants for miles around, whose flaming metal had been a beacon glowing in the sky.

A ship and a body, and a track that led from ship to body across three hundred yards of marsh. The trace of one man's footprints and the furrowing trail of other feet that dragged across the mud. And the man who had carried the dead man had been Asher Sutton, for Sutton's fingerprints were on the muddied clothing of the man lying at the swamp's edge.

Sutton, thought Adams wearily. It is always Sutton. Sutton's name upon the flyleaf out of Aldebaran XII. Sutton's fingerprints upon a dead man's clothing. The man in the mask had said there would have been no incident on Aldebaran if it had not been for Sutton. And Sutton had killed Benton, Earth's greatest duelist—with a bullet in the arm.

Ker-up, clickity, click, ker-up . . .

Dr. Raven, called in by Adams, had sat in that chair across the desk and told of the afternoon Sutton had dropped in at the university.

"He found destiny," Dr. Raven had said, and he said it as if it were commonplace, as if it were a thing that could have been expected all along.

"Not a religion," Dr. Raven had said, with the afternoon sunlight shining on his snow white hair. "Oh, dear, no, not a religion. Actual destiny."

DESTINY, noun. Destiny—the predetermined course in events often conceived as a resistless power or agency . . .

"The accepted definition," Dr. Raven had said, as if he might be addressing a lecture hall, "may have to be modified slightly when Asher writes his book."

But how could Sutton find destiny? Destiny was an idea, an abstract.

"You forget," Dr. Raven had told Adams, speaking gently as one would to a child, "that part about the resistless power or agency. That is what he found . . . the power or agency."

"Sutton told me about the beings he found on Cygni," Adams had said. "He was at a loss to describe them. The nearest that he could come was symbiotic abstractions."

Dr. Raven had nodded his head and pulled his shell-like ears and figured that maybe symbiotic abstractions would fit the bill, although it was hard for one to decide just what a symbiotic abstraction was, or what it would look like.

Under questioning, he reiterated that it was not a new religion Sutton had found. "Oh, gracious, no, not a religion."

And Raven, Adams thought, should be the one to know, for he was one of the galaxy's best and most widely known comparative religionists.

"Although it would be a new idea," Dr. Raven had said. "Bless me, yes, an absolutely new idea."

And ideas are dangerous, Adams told himself.

For Man was spread thin across the galaxy. So thin that one word —literally one spoken word or unbidden thought—might be enough to set off the train of rebellion and of violence that would sweep Man back to the solar system, back to the puny ring of circling planets that had caged him in before.

One could not take a chance. One could not gamble with an imponderable.

Better that one man die needlessly than that the whole race lose its grip upon the galaxy. Better that one new idea, however great, be blotted out than that Mankind be swept from the billion stars.

Item one: Sutton wasn't human.

Item Two: He was not telling all he knew.

Item Three: He had a manuscript which was not decipherable.

Item Four: He meant to write a book.

Item Five: He had a new idea.

Conclusion: Sutton must be killed.

Ker-up, clickity, click . . .

War, the man had said. A war in time.

IT WOULD spread thin, too, like Man across the galaxy.

It would be three-dimensional chess with a million billion squares and pieces, and with the rules changing at every move.

It would reach back to win its battles. It would strike at points in time and space which would not even know that there was a war. It could, logically, go back to the silver mines of Athens, to the horse and chariot

of Thutmoses III, to the sailing of Columbus. It would involve all fields of human endeavor and human speculation, and it would twist the dreams of men who had never thought of time except as a moving shadow across a sun dial's face.

It would involve spies and propagandists—spies to learn the factors of the past so that they could be plotted in the campaign strategy, propagandists to twist the fabric of the past so that strategy could be the more effective.

It would load the personnel of the Justice Department of the year 7990 with spies and fifth columnists and saboteurs. And it would do that so cleverly one could never find the spies.

But, as in an ordinary, honest war, there would be strategic points. As in chess, there would be one key piece.

Sutton was that piece. He was the pawn that stood in the way of the sweep of bishop and of rook. He was the pawn that both sides were lining up on, bring all their pressure on a single point . . . and when one side was ready, when it gained a fraction of advantage, the slaughter would begin.

Adams folded his arms upon the desk and laid his head upon them. His shoulders twitched, but he had no tears.

"Ash, boy," he said. "Ash, I counted on you so much."

The silence brought him straight in the chair again.

For a moment, he was unable to locate it . . . determine what was wrong. And then he knew.

The psych-tracer had stopped its burping.

He leaned forward and bent above it and there was no sound of heart, of breath, of blood coursing in the body.

The motivating force that had operated it—Asher Sutton—has ceased to be.

Slowly, Adams rose from his chair, took down his hat and put it on.

For the first time in his life, Christopher Adams was going home before the day was over.

XXIV

SUTTON stiffened in his chair and then relaxed. For this was a bluff, he told himself. These men wouldn't kill him. They wanted the book and dead men do not write.

Case answered him, almost as if Sutton had spoken what he thought aloud. "You must not count on us as honorable men; neither of us ourselves would lay a claim to that. Pringle, I think, will bear me out in that."

"Oh, certainly," said Pringle. "I have no use for honor."

"It would have meant a great deal to us if we could have taken you back to Trevor and . . ."

"Wait a second," interrupted Sutton. "Who is this Trevor? He's a new one."

"Oh, Trevor," said Pringle. "Just

an oversight. Trevor is the head of the corporation."

"The corporation," added Case, "that wants to get your book."

"Trevor would have heaped us with honors," Pringle said, "and loaded us with wealth if we had pulled it off. But since you won't cooperate, we'll have to cast around for some other way to make ourselves a profit."

"So we switch sides," explained Case, "and we shoot you. Morgan will pay high for you, but he wants you dead. Your carcass will be worth a good deal to Morgan. Oh, yes, quite a lot."

"And you will sell it to him."

"Of course," said Pringle. "We never miss a bet."

Case purred at Sutton: "You do not object, I hope."

Sutton shrugged indifferently. "What you do with my cadaver is no concern of mine."

"Well, then," said Case, and he raised the gun.

"Just a second," Sutton said.

Case lowered the gun. "Now what?"

"He wants a cigaret," said Pringle. "Men who are about to be executed always want a cigaret or a glass of wine or a chicken dinner or something of the sort."

"I want to ask a question," Sutton said.

Case nodded.

"I take it," Sutton said, "that in your time I've already written this book."

"That's right," Case told him. "An honest and efficient job."

"Under your imprint or someone else's?"

Pringle cackled. "Under someone else's, of course. If you did it under ours, why do you think we'd be back here at all?"

Sutton wrinkled his brow. "I've already written it," he said, "without your help and without your editing. Now if I did it a second time, and wrote it the way you wanted, there would be complications."

"None," said Case, "we couldn't overcome. Nothing that could not be explained quite satisfactorily."

"And now that you're going to kill me, there'll be no book at all. How will you handle that?"

Case frowned. "It will be difficult and unfortunate . . . unfortunate for many people. But we'll work it out." He raised the gun. "Sure you won't change your mind?"

Sutton shook his head.

They won't shoot, he told himself. It's a bluff. The deck is cold and . . .

Case pulled the trigger.

A mighty force, like a striking fist, slammed into Sutton's body and shoved him back so hard that the chair tilted and then slued around, yawing like a ship caught in magnetic stresses.

Fire flashed within his skull. He felt one swift shriek of agony that took him in its claws and lifted him and shook him, jangling every nerve, grating every bone.

There was one thought, one fleeting thought that he tried to grasp and hold, but it wriggled from his brain like an eel slipping free from bloody fingers.

Change, said the thought. Change.

He felt the change . . . felt it start even as he died.

And death was a soft thing, soft and black, cool and sweet and gracious. He slipped into it as a swimmer slips into the surf and it closed over him and held him. He felt the pulse and beat of it and knew the vastness and the sureness of it.

Back on Earth, the psych-tracer faltered to a stop and Christopher Adams got up and put on his hat and went home for the first time in his life before the day was done.

XXV

HERKIMER lay on his bed and tried to sleep, but sleep was long in coming. And he wondered that he should sleep . . . that he should sleep and eat and drink as Man. For he was not a man and would never be a man.

His origin was chemical and Man's was biological. He was the imitation and Man was reality. It is the method, he told himself, the method and the terminology, that keep me from being Man, for in all things else we are the same.

The method and the name of android and the tattoo mark I wear upon my brow.

I am as good as Man and as smart as Man, for all I act the clown, and could be as treacherous as Man if I had the chance. Except I wear a tattoo mark and I am owned and I have no soul . . . although sometimes I wonder.

Herkimer lay very quiet and gazed at the ceiling and tried to remember certain things, but it was frighteningly complicated.

First there was the tool and then the machine, which was no more than a complicated tool, and both machine and tool were no more than the extension of a hand.

Man's hand, of course.

Then came the robot and a robot was a machine that walked like a man. That walked and looked and talked like a man and did the things Man wished, but it was a caricature. No matter how sleekly machined, no matter how cleverly designed, there never was a danger that it be mistaken for a man.

And after the robot?

We are not robots, Herkimer told himself, and we are not men. We are not machines, because we are flesh and blood. We are chemicals made into the shapes of our creators and assigned a chemical life so close to the life of our makers that some day one of them will find, to his astonishment, that there is no difference.

Made in the shape of men . . . and the resemblance is so close that we wear a tattoo mark so that men may know us apart.

So close to Man and yet not Man.

Although there is hope . . , if we can keep the Cradle secret, if we can keep it hidden from the eyes of Man. Someday there will be no difference. Someday a man will talk to an android and think he is talking to a fellow man. And he will be.

HERKIMER stretched his arms and folded them over his head.

He tried to examine his mind, to arrive at motives and evaluations, but it was hard to do. No rancor, certainly. No jealousy. No bitterness. Just a nagging feeling of inadequacy, of having almost reached the goal and fallen short.

But there was comfort, he thought. There was comfort if nothing else.

And that comfort must be kept. Kept for those like himself, the ones that were less than Man.

He lay for a long time, thinking about comfort, watching the dark square of the window with the rime of frost upon it and the stars shining through the frost, listening to the thin whine of the feeble, vicious weasel-wind as it snarled across the roof.

Sleep did not come and he got up at last and turned on the light. Shivering, he got into his clothes and pulled a book out of his pocket. Huddling close to the lamp, he turned the pages to a passage worn thin with reading.

There is no thing, no matter how created, how born or how conceived or made, which knows the pulse of life, that goes alone. That assurance I can give you. . . .

He closed the book and held it clasped between the palms of his two hands.

. . . how born or how conceived *or made.*

Made.

All that mattered was the pulse of life, the stir of sentiency.

Comfort.

And it must be kept.

I did my duty, he told himself. My willing, almost eager duty. I still am doing it.

I acted the part, he told himself, and I think I acted well. I acted a part when I carried the challenge to Asher Sutton's room. I acted a part when I came to him as a part of the *estate duello* . . . the saucy, subservient part of any common android.

I did my duty for him . . . and yet not for him, but for comfort, for the privilege of knowing and believing that neither I nor any other living thing, no matter how lowly it may be, will ever be alone.

I hit him. I hit him on the button and knocked him out, and I lifted him in my arms and carried him into the spaceship.

He was angry at me, but that does not matter. His anger cannot wash away a single word of the assurance he gave me.

Thunder shook the house. The window, for a moment, flared with sudden crimson.

Herkimer came to his feet and ran for the window and stood there, gripping the ledge, watching the red twinkle of dwindling rocket tubes.

Fear hit him in the stomach and he raced out of the door and down the hall, to Sutton's room.

He did not knock nor did he turn the knob. He hit the door and it shattered open, with a wrecked and twisted lock dangling by its screws.

The bed was empty and there was no one in the room.

XXVI

SUTTON sensed resurrection and he fought against it, for death was so comfortable. Like a soft, warm bed. And resurrection was a strident, insistent, maddening alarm clock that shrilled across the predawn chill of a dreadful, frowsy room. Dreadful with its life and its raw reality and its sharp, sickening reminder that one must get up.

But this is not the first time, said Sutton. This is not the first time that I died and came to life again. For I did it once before and that time I was dead for a long, long time.

There was a hard, flat surface underneath him and he lay face down upon it. For what seemed an interminable stretch of time, his mind struggled to visualize the hardness and smoothness beneath him. Hard and flat and smooth, three words, but they did not help one see or understand the thing that they described.

He felt life creep back and quicken, seep along his legs and arms. But he wasn't breathing and his heart was still.

Floor.

That was it . . . that was the word for the thing on which he lay. The flat, hard, smooth surface was a floor. The floor of what?

Sounds came to him, but at first he didn't call them sounds, for he had no word for them at all, and then, a moment later, he remembered that that was the word.

Now he could move one finger. Then a second finger.

He opened his eyes and there was light.

The sounds were voices and the voices were words and the words were thoughts.

It takes so long to figure things out, Sutton wearily told himself.

"We should have tried a little harder," said a voice, "and a little longer. The trouble with us, Case, is that we have no patience."

"Patience wouldn't have done a bit of good," said Case. "He was convinced that we were bluffing. No matter what we'd done or said, he'd still have thought we were bluffing and we would have gotten nowhere. There was only one thing to do."

"YES, I know," Pringle agreed. "Convince him that we weren't bluffing." He made a sound of blowing out his breath. "Pity, too. He was such a bright young man."

They were silent for a time and

now it was not life alone, but strength, that was flowing into Sutton. Strength to stand and walk, strength to lift his arms, strength to vent his anger. Strength to kill two men.

"We won't do so badly," Pringle went on. "Morgan and his crowd will pay us just as much."

Case was squeamish. "I don't like it, Pringle. A dead man is a dead man if you kill him and leave him. But when you sell him, that makes you a butcher."

"That's not the thing that's worrying me," Pringle answered. "What will it do to the future, Case? To our future. We had a future with many of its facets based on Sutton's book. If we had managed to change the book a little, it wouldn't have mattered much . . . wouldn't have mattered at all, in fact, the way we had it figured out. But now Sutton's dead. There will be no book by Sutton. The future will be completely different."

Sutton rose to his feet.

They spun around and faced him and Case's hand went for his gun.

"Go ahead," invited Sutton. "Shoot me full of holes. You won't live a minute longer for it."

He tried to hate them, as he had hated Benton during that one fleeting moment back on Earth. Hatred so strong and primal that it had blasted the man's mind into oblivion. . . . killed him with only a puzzling bullet in his arm and a hate-shattered brain.

But there was no hate. Just a ponderous, determined will to destroy a bothersome hindrance.

He moved forward on inexorable legs and his hands reached out.

Pringle ran, squealing, seeking to escape. Case's gun spat twice and when blood oozed out and ran down Sutton's chest and he still came on, Case threw away his weapon and backed against the wall.

It didn't take long.

They couldn't get away.

There was no place to go.

XXVII

SUTTON maneuvered the ship down against the tiny asteroid, a whirling piece of debris not much bigger than the ship itself. He felt it touch and his thumb reached out and snubbed over the gravity lever. The ship clamped down, to go tumbling through space with the twisting chunk of rock.

Sutton let his hands fall to his side and sat quietly in the pilot's chair. In front of him, space was black and friendless, streaked by the pinpoint stars that spun in lines of fire across the field of vision, writing cryptic messages of cold, white light across the cosmos as the asteroid bumbled on its erratic course.

Safe, he told himself. Safe for a while, at least. Perhaps safe forever, for there might be no one looking for him.

Safe with a hole blasted through

his chest, with blood running down his front and splashing on the floor.

Handy thing to have, he thought grimly, this second body of mine. This body that was grafted on me by the Cygnians. It will keep me going until . . . until . . .

Until what?

Until I can get back to Earth and walk into a doctor's office and say: "I got shot up a little. How about a patching job?"

Sutton chuckled. He could see the doctor having a fit.

Or going back to Cygni? But they wouldn't let me in.

Or just going back to Earth the way I am and forget about the doctor? I could get other clothes and the bleeding will stop when the blood's all gone.

BUT I wouldn't breathe, and they would notice that.

"Johnny," he said, but there was no answer, just a feeble stir of life within his brain, a sign of recognition, like a dog wagging its tail to let you know it heard, but was too busy with a bone to let anything distract it.

"Johnny, is there any way?"

There might be. It was a hope to cling to, a thing to think about.

Not even yet, he suspected, had he begun to plumb the strange depth of abilities lodged within his body and his mind.

He had not known that his hate alone could kill, that hate could spear out from his brain like a lance of steel and strike a man dead. And yet Benton had died with a bullet in the arm . . . only he had been dead before the bullet hit him. For Benton had fired first and missed, and Benton, alive, never would have missed.

Sutton had not known that by mind alone he could control the energy needed to lift the dead weight of a ship from a boulder bed and fly it across eleven years of space. And yet that was what he'd done, winnowing the energy from the flaming stars so far away they dimmed to almost nothing, from the random specks of matter in the void.

And while he knew that he could change at will from one life to another, he had not known for certain that when one way of life was killed, the other way would take over automatically. Yet that was what had happened. Case had killed him and he had died and he had come to life again. But he had died before the change had started. Of that much he was sure. For he remembered death and recognized it. He knew it from the time he had died before.

He felt his body eating . . . sucking at the stars as a human sucks an orange, nibbling at the energy imprisoned in the bit of rock to which the ship was clamped, pouncing on the tiny leaks of power from the ship's atomic motors.

Eating to grow strong, eating to repair . . .

"Johnny, is there any way?"

And there was no answer.

HE LET his head sag forward until it lay upon the inclined panel that housed the instruments.

His body went on eating at the stars.

He listened to the slow drip of blood falling from his body and splashing on the floor.

His mind was clouding and he let it cloud, for there was nothing to do. There was no need to use it; he did not know how to use it. He did not know what he could do or what he couldn't do, nor how to go about it.

He had fallen, he remembered, screaming down the alien sky, knowing in a moment of wild elation that he had broken through, that the world of Cygni VII lay beneath his hand. That what all the navies of the Earth had failed to do, he'd done.

The planet was rushing up and he saw the tangled geography of it that snaked in black and gray across his vision plate.

That was twenty years ago, but he remembered it, in the dim fog of his mind, as if it were happening this very moment.

He reached out a hand and hauled back on a lever and the lever would not move. The ship plunged down and for a moment he felt a rising fear that exploded into panic.

One fact stood out, one stark, black fact in all the flashing fragments of thoughts and schemes and prayer that went screeching through his brain. One stark fact . . . he was about to crash.

He did not remember crashing, for he probably never knew exactly when he crashed. It was only fear and terror and then no fear nor terror. It was consciousness and awareness and then a nothingness that was a restfulness and a vast forgetting.

Awareness came back . . . in a moment or an eon, which, he could not tell. But an awareness that was different, a sentiency that was only partly human, just a small percentage human. And a knowledge that was new, but which, it seemed, he had held forever.

He sensed or knew, for it was not seeing, his body stretched out on the ground smashed and broken, twisted out of human shape. And although he knew it was his body and knew its every superficial function and the plan of its assembly, he felt a twinge of wonder at the thing which lay there and knew that here was a problem which would tax his utmost ingenuity.

For the body must be put together, must be straightened out and reintegrated and co-ordinated so that it would work and the life that had escaped be returned to it again.

He thought of Humpty Dumpty and the thought was strange, as if the nursery rhyme were something new or something long forgotten.

Humpty Dumpty, said another part of him, supplies no answer, and he knew that it was right, for Humpty, he recalled, could not be put together again.

He became aware there were two of him; one part of him had an-

swered the other part of him. The answerer and the listener, and although they were one, they were also separate. There was a cleavage he could not understand.

"I am your destiny," said the answerer. "I was with you when you came to life and I will stay with you till you die. I do not control you and I do not coerce you, but I try to guide you, although you do not know it."

Sutton, the small part of him that was Sutton, said: "I know it now."

He knew it as if he'd always known it and that was queer, for he had only just then learned it. Knowledge, he realized, was all tangled up, for there were two of him . . . he and destiny. He could not immediately distinguish between the things he knew as Sutton alone and those he knew as Sutton plus Sutton's destiny.

I cannot know, he thought. I could not know then and I cannot know now. For there still is deep within me the two facets of my being, the human that I am and the destiny that would guide me to a greater glory and a greater life, if I would only let it.

FOR it will not coerce me and it will not stop me. It will only give me hunches; it will only whisper warnings and encouragement to me. It is the thing called conscience and the thing called judgment and the thing called intuition.

And it sits within my brain as it sits within the brain of no other thing, for I am one with it. I know of it with a dreadful certainty and others do not know at all, or, if they do, they only guess at the great immensity of its truthfulness.

And all must know. All must know each thing has destiny.

But there is something going on to keep them from knowing, or to twist their knowledge so their knowing is all wrong. I must find out what it is and I must correct it. And somehow I must strike into the future; I must set it aright for the days I will not see.

I am your destiny, the answerer had said.

Destiny, not fatalism.

Destiny, not predetermination.

Destiny, the way of men and races and of worlds.

Destiny, the way you made your life, the way you shaped your living . . . the way it was meant to be, the way that it would be if you listened to the still, small voice that talked to you at the many turning points and crossroads.

But if you did not listen . . . why, then, you did not listen and you did not hear. And there was no power that could make you listen. There was no penalty if you did not listen except the penalty of having gone against your destiny.

There were other thoughts or other voices. Sutton could not tell which they were, but they were outside the tangled thing that was he and destiny.

That is my body, he thought. And I am somewhere else. Some place

where there is no seeing as I used to see . . . nor hearing, although I see and hear, but with another's senses and in an alien way.

The screen let him through, said one thought, although screen was not the word it used.

And another said that the screen had served its purpose.

And another said that there was a certain technique he had picked up on a planet, the name of which blurred and ran and made a splotch and had no meaning at all, so far as Sutton could make out.

Still another pointed out the singular complexity and inefficiency of Sutton's mangled body and spoke enthusiastically of the simplicity and perfection of direct energy intake.

Sutton tried to cry out to them for the love of God to hurry, for his body was a fragile thing, that if they waited too long it would be past all mending. But he could not say it, and, as if in a dream, he listened to the interplay of thought, the flash and flicker of individual opinion, all molding into one cohesive thought that spelled eventual decision.

He tried to wonder where he was, tried to orient himself and found that he could not even define himself. For himself no longer was a body, nor a place in space or time, nor even a personal pronoun. It was a hanging, dangling thing that had no substance, no fixture in the scheme of time and it could not recognize itself, no matter what it did. It was a vacuum that knew it existed and it was dominated by something else that might as well have been a vacuum for all the recognition he could make of it.

He was outside his body and he lived. But where or how, there was no way of knowing.

"I am your destiny," the answerer that seemed a part of him had said.

But destiny was a word and nothing more. An idea. An abstract. A tenuous definition for something that the mind of Man had conceived, but could not prove . . . that the mind of Man was willing to agree was an idea only and could never be proved.

"YOU are wrong," said Sutton's destiny. "Destiny is real, although you cannot see it. It is real for you and for all other things . . . for every single thing that knows the surge of life. And it has always been and it will always be."

"This is not death?" asked Sutton.

"You are the first to come to us," said destiny. "We cannot let you die. We will give you back your body, but until then you will live with me. You will be part of me. And that is only fair, for I have always lived with you; I have always been part of you."

"You did not want me here," said Sutton. "You built a screen to keep me out."

"We wanted one," said destiny. "One only. You are that one; there will be no more."

"But the screen?"

"It was keyed to a mind," said destiny. "To a certain mind. The one mind we wanted."

"But you let me die."

"You had to die," destiny told him. "Until you died and became one of us, you could not know. In your body we could not have reached you. You had to die so that you would be freed and I was there to take you and make you part of me so you would understand."

"I do not understand."

"You will," said destiny. "You will."

And I did, thought Sutton.

HIS body shook as he remembered and his mind stood awed with the vast, unexpected immensity of destiny . . . of trillions upon trillions of destinies to match the teeming life of the galaxy.

Destiny whispered and a thing climbed dripping from the water and in the eons to come its fins were legs and its gills were nostrils.

Destiny stirred and a shaggy ape thing stooped and picked up a broken stick. It stirred again and he struck flint together. It stirred once more and there was a bow and arrow. Again and the wheel was born.

Symbiotic abstractions. Parasites. Invisible partners. Call them what you would.

They were destiny.

And the time had come for the galaxy to know of destiny.

If parasites, then beneficial parasites, ready to give more than they could take. For all they got was the sense of living, the sense of being . . . and what they gave, or stood ready to give, was far more than mere living.

For many of the lives they lived must be dull, indeed. An angleworm, for instance. Or the bloated mass of instinct that crept through nauseous jungle worlds.

But because of them, someday an angleworm might be more than an angleworm . . . or a greater angleworm. The bloated mass of instinct might be something that would reach to greater heights than Man.

For every thing that moved, whether intelligent or mindless, across the face of any world, was not one thing, but two. It and its own individual destiny.

And sometimes destiny took hold and won . . . and sometimes it didn't. But where there was destiny, there was hope forever. For destiny was hope. And destiny was everywhere.

No thing walks alone.

Nor crawls nor vegetates nor swims nor flies nor shambles.

One planet barred to every mind but one; and once that mind arrived, barred forevermore.

One mind to tell the galaxy when the galaxy was ready. One mind to tell of destiny and hope.

That mind, thought Sutton, is my own.

Lord help me now.

For if I had been the one to choose, if I had been asked, if I had had a thing to say about it, it would

not have been me, but someone or something else. Some other mind in another million years. Some other thing in ten times another million years.

It is too much to ask, he thought . . . too much to ask a being with a mind as frail as Man's, to bear the weight of revelation, to bear the load of knowing.

BUT destiny put the finger on me. Happenstance or accident or pure blind luck . . . it would be destiny.

I lived with destiny, as destiny . . . I was a part of destiny instead of destiny merely a part of me and we came to know each other as if we were two humans . . . better than if we were two humans. For destiny was I and I was destiny. Destiny had no name and I called it Johnny and the fact that I had to name him is a joke that destiny, my destiny, still can chuckle over.

I lived with Johnny, the vital part of me, the spark of me that men call life and do not understand . . . the part of me I still do not understand . . . until my body had been repaired again. And then I returned to it and it was a different body, a better body, for the many destinies had been astounded and horrified at the inefficiency and flimsiness of the human structure.

When they fixed it up, they made it better. They tinkered it so it had a lot of things it did not have before . . . many things, I suspect, that I still do not know about and will not know about until it is time to use them. Some things, perhaps, I'll never know at all.

When I went back to my body, destiny came and lived with me again. But now I knew him and recognized him and I called him Johnny and we talked together. Now I never failed to hear him, as I must many times have failed to hear him in the past.

"Johnny," Sutton called. He waited and there was no answer. "Johnny," he called again and there was terror in his voice. For Johnny must be there. Destiny must be there.

Unless . . . the thought struck slowly, kindly . . . unless Asher Sutton was really dead. Unless this was dreaming, unless this was a twilight zone where knowledge and a sense of being linger for a moment between the state of life and death.

Johnny's voice was small, very small and very far away: "Ash."

"Yes, Johnny!" He forgot his doubts, sat erect and tense.

"The engines, Ash. The engines."

He fought his body out of the pilot's chair, stood on weaving legs.

He could scarcely see . . . just the faded, blurred, shifting outline of the shape of metal that enclosed him. His feet were solid weights that he could not move. They were no part of him at all.

He stumbled, staggered forward, fell flat upon his face.

Shock, he thought. The shock of violence, the shock of death, the

shock of draining blood, of mangled, blasted flesh.

There once had been strength that had brought him, clear-eyed, clear-brained, to his feet. A strength that had been great enough to take the lives of the two men who had killed him. The strength of vengeance.

But that strength was gone and now he knew it had been the strength of will alone.

He struggled to his hands and knees and crept. He stopped and rested and then crept a few feet more. His head hung limp between his shoulders, drooling blood that left a trail across the floor.

He found the door of the engine room and by slow degrees pulled himself upward to the latch.

His fingers found the latch and pulled it down, but they had no strength. They slipped off the metal. He fell into a huddled pile of sheer defeat against the hard coldness of the door.

He waited for a long time and then tried again. This time the latch clicked open even as his fingers slipped again. And as he fell, he fell across the threshold.

Intelligence, senses, consciousness . . . they all vanished in the same micro-second.

XXVIII

ASHER SUTTON awoke to darkness.

To darkness and unknowing.

To unknowing and a slow, expanding wonder.

He was lying on a hard, smooth surface and a roof of metal came down close above his head. And beside him was a thing that purred and rumbled. One arm was flung across the purring thing and somehow he knew that he had slept with the thing clasped to him.

There was no sense of time or sense of place, and no means of any life before. As if he had sprung full-limbed by magic into life and intelligence and knowing.

He lay still and his eyes became accustomed to the dark, and he saw the open door and the dark stain, now dry, that led across the threshold into the room beyond. Something had dragged itself there, from the other room into this one, and left a trail behind it. He lay for a long time, wondering what the thing might be, with the queasiness of terror gnawing at his mind. For the thing might still be with him and it might be dangerous.

But he felt he was alone, sensed a loneness in the throbbing of the engine at his side . . . and it was thus for the first time that he knew the purring thing for what it was. Name and recognition had slipped back into his consciousness without his searching for it, as if it were a thing he had known all the time and now he knew what it was, except that it seemed to him the name had come ahead of recognition, and that, he thought, was strange.

So the thing beside him was an engine and he was lying on a floor and the metal close above his head was a roof of some sort. A narrow space, he thought. A narrow space that housed an engine and a door that opened into another room.

A ship. That was it. He was in a ship. And the trail of dark that ran across the threshold . . .?

At first he thought that some imagined thing had crawled in slime of its own making to mark the trail, but now he remembered. It had been himself crawling to the engines.

Lying quietly, he remembered it all, and in wonder he tested his aliveness. He lifted a hand and felt his chest. The clothes were burned away and their scorched edges were crisp between his fingers, but his chest was whole . . . whole and smooth and hard. Sound human flesh. No ragged, bleeding holes.

So it was possible, he thought. I remember that I wondered if it was . . . if Johnny might not have some trick up his sleeve, if my body might not have some capability which I could not suspect.

It sucked at the stars and nibbled at the asteroid and it yearned toward the engines. It wanted energy. And the engines had available energy . . . more than the distant stars, more than the cold, frozen chunk of rock that was the asteroid.

So I crawled to reach the engines and I left a dark death-trail behind me and I slept with the engines in my arms. And my body—my direct-intake, energy-eating body—sucked the power that was needed from the flaming core of the reaction chambers.

And I am whole again.

I am back on my breath-and-blood body once again and I can return to Earth.

SUTTON crawled out of the engine room and stood on his two feet.

Faint starlight came through the vision plates and scattered like jewel dust along the floor and walls. And there were two huddled shapes, one in the middle of the floor and another in a corner.

His mind took them in and turned them around as they were dead and as they might have been alive, and in a little while he remembered what they were. The humanity within him shivered at the black, sprawled shapes, but another part of him, a cold, hard inner core, stood undismayed in the face of death.

He moved forward on slow feet and slowly knelt beside one of the bodies. It must be Case, he thought, for Case had been thin and tall. But he could not see the face and he did not wish to see it, for in some dark corner of his mind he still remembered what Case and Pringle had looked like when they died.

His hands went down and searched through the clothing. He made a tiny pile of the things he found, and finally he found the thing he was looking for.

Squatting on his heels, he opened the book to the title page and it was the same as the one he carried in his pocket. The same except for a line of type at the very bottom:

Revised Edition

So that was it. That was the meaning of the word that had puzzled him: Revisionists.

There had been a book and it had been revised. Those who lived by the revised edition were the Revisionists. And the others? He wondered, running through the names . . . Fundamentalists, Primitives, Orthodox, Hard Shell. There were others, he was sure, but it didn't really matter what the others would be called.

There were two blank pages and the text began:

We are not alone.

No one ever is alone.

Not since the first faint stirring of the first flicker of life, on the first planet in the galaxy that knew the quickening of sentiency, has there ever been a single entity that walked or crawled or slithered down the path of life alone.

His eye went down the page to the first footnote.

** This is the first of many statements which, wrongly interpreted, have caused some readers to believe that Sutton meant to say that life, regardless of its intelligence or moral precepts, is the beneficiary of destiny. His first line should refute this entire line of reasoning, for Sutton used the pronoun "we" and all students of semantics are agreed that it is a common idiom for any genus, when speaking of itself, to use such a personal pronoun. Had Sutton meant all life, he would have written "all life." But by using the personal pronoun, he undeniably was referring to his own genus, the human race, and the human race alone. He apparently erroneously believed, a not uncommon belief of his day, that the Earth had been the first planet to know life and this will explain his reference to the first planet of the galaxy to know the quickening of life. There is no doubt that, in part, Sutton's revelations of his great discovery of destiny have been tampered with. Assiduous research and study, however, have resulted in determining beyond reasonable doubt which portions are genuine and which are not. Those parts which patently have been altered will be noted and the reasons for this belief will be carefully and frankly pointed out.*

SUTTON riffled through the pages quickly. More than half the text was taken up by the fine print foot-

notes. Some of the pages had two or three lines of actual text and the rest was filled with lengthy explanation and refutation.

He slapped the book shut, held it angrily between his flattened palms.

I tried so hard, he thought. I repeated and reiterated and underscored.

Not human life alone, but *all life*. Everything that lives.

And yet they twist my words.

They fight a war so that my words shall not be the words I wrote, so that the things I meant to say shall be misinterpreted. They scheme and fight and murder so that the great cloak of destiny shall rest on one race alone . . . so that the most grasping and ambitious race ever spawned shall steal the thing that was meant not for them alone, but for every living thing.

And somehow I must stop it. Somehow it must be stopped. Somehow my words must stand, so that all may read and know, without the smokescreen of crooked theorizing and dishonest interpretation and weasel logic confusing them.

FOR it is so simple. Such a simple thing:

All life has destiny, not human life alone.

There is one destiny partner for every living thing. For every living thing and then to spare. They wait for life to happen, and each time it occurs, one of them is there and stays there until the particular life is ended. How, I do not know, nor why. I do not know if the actual Johnny is lodged within my mind and being, or if he merely keeps in contact with me from Cygni. But I know that he is with me. I know that he will stay.

And yet the Revisionists will twist my words and discredit me. They will change my book and dig up old scandals about the Suttons so that the mistakes of my forebears, magnified many times, will tend to smear my name.

They sent back a man who talked to John H. Sutton and he told them things that they could have used. For John Sutton said that there are skeletons in every family closet, and in that he spoke the truth. And, being old and garrulous, he talked about those skeletons.

But those tales were not carried forward into the future to be of any use, for the man who heard them came tramping up the road with a bandage on his head and no shoes on his feet.

Something happened and he could not go back.

Something happened.

Something . . .

Sutton rose slowly.

Something happened, he said, talking to himself, and I know what it was.

Six thousand years ago in a place that was called Wisconsin.

He moved forward, heading for the pilot's chair and the Wisconsin of sixty centuries in the past.

XXIX

CHRISTOPHER ADAMS came into his office and hung up his hat and coat.

He turned around and pulled out the chair before his desk and in the act of sitting down, he froze and listened.

The psych-tracer burped at him.

Ker-up, it chuckled. *Ker-up, click-ity, click, ker-up.*

Christopher Adams straightened from his half-sitting position and put on his hat and coat again.

Going out, he slammed the door behind him.

In all his life, he had never slammed a door.

XXX

SUTTON breasted the river, swimming with slow, sure strokes. The water was warm against his body and it talked to him with a deep, important voice and Sutton thought: It is trying to tell me something, as it has tried to tell people something all down through the ages. A mighty tongue talking down the land, gossiping to itself when there is no one to hear, but trying, always trying to tell its people the news it has to tell. Some of them, perhaps, have grasped a certain truth and a certain philosophy from the river, but none of them have ever reached the meaning of the river's language, for it is an unknown language.

Like the language, Sutton thought, I used to make my notes. For they had to be in a language which no one else could read, a language that had been forgotten in the galaxy eons before any tongue now living lisped its baby talk. Either a language that had been forgotten or one that never could be known.

I do not know that language, Sutton told himself, the language of my notes. I do not know whence it came or when or how. I asked, but they would not tell me. Johnny tried to tell me once, but I could not grasp it, for it was a thing that the brain of Man could not accept.

I know its symbols and the things they stand for, but I do not know the sounds that make it. My tongue might not be able to form the sounds that make the spoken language. For all I know, it might be the language that this river talks . . . or the language of some race that went to disaster and to dust a million or a billion years ago.

The black of night came down to nestle against the black of flowing river and the Moon had not arisen, would not rise for many hours to come. The starlight made little diamond points on the rippling waves of the pulsing river. On the shore ahead, the lights of homes made jagged patterns up and down the land.

Herkimer has the notes, Sutton told himself, and I hope he has sense enough to hide them. I will need them later, but not now. I would like

to see Herkimer, but I can't take the chance; they'll be watching him. And there's no doubt they have a tracer on me, but if I move fast enough I can keep out of their way.

His feet struck gravel bottom and he let himself down, waded up the shelving shore. The night wind struck him and he shivered; the river had been warm from a day of sun, and the wind had a touch of chill.

Herkimer, of course, would be one of those who had come back from the future to see that he wrote the book as he would have written it if there had been no interference. Herkimer and Eva . . . and of the two, Sutton told himself, he could trust Herkimer. For an android would fight, would fight and die for the thing that the book would say. And so would every non-human form of life that could read and understand Asher Sutton's book. But no human could be trusted.

HE FOUND a grassy bank and sat down and took off his clothes to wring them dry, then put them on again. He struck out across the meadow toward the highway that arrowed up the valley.

No one would find the ship at the bottom of the river . . . not for a while, at least. And a few hours were all he needed. A few hours to ask a thing that he must know, a few minutes then to get back to the ship again.

But he couldn't waste any time. He had to get the information the quickest way he could. For if Adams had a tracer on him—and Adams would have a tracer on him—they would already know that he had returned to Earth.

Once again came the old nagging wonder about Adams. How had Adams known that he was coming back from 61 Cygni, and why had he set a mouse trap for him when he did arrive? What information had he gotten that would make him give the order that Sutton must be shot on sight?

Someone had reached him . . . someone who had evidence to show him. For Adams would not go on anything less than evidence. And the only person who could have given him any information would have been someone from the future. One of those, perhaps, who contended that the book must not be written, that it must not exist, that the knowledge that it held be blotted out forever. And if the man who was to write it should die, what could be more simple?

Except that the book had been written. The book already did exist. The knowledge apparently was spread across the galaxy.

That would be catastrophe . . . for if the book were not written, then it never had existed. The whole segment of the future that had been touched by the book in any wise would be blotted out, along with the book that had not been.

And that could not be, Sutton told himself.

That meant that Asher Sutton could not, would not be allowed to die before the book was written.

However it were written, the book must be written or the future was a lie.

Sutton shrugged. The tangled thread of logic was too much for him. There was no precept, no precedent upon which one might develop the pattern of cause and result.

Alternate futures? Maybe, but it didn't seem likely. Alternate futures were a fantasy that employed semantics-twisting to prove a point, a clever use of words that covered up and masked the fallacies.

He crossed the road and took a footpath that led to a house standing on a knoll.

In the marsh down near the river, the frogs had struck up their piping and somewhere far away a wild duck called in the darkness. In the hills the whippoorwills began the evening forum. The scent of new-cut grass lay heavy in the air and the smell of fog was crawling up the hills.

The path came out on a patio and Sutton moved across it.

A man's voice came to him.

"Good evening," it said, and Sutton wheeled around.

He saw the man, then, for the first time. A man who sat in his chair and smoked his pipe beneath the evening stars.

"I hate to bother you," said Sutton, "but I wonder if I might use your phone."

"Certainly, Ash," said Adams. "Anything you wish."

Sutton started and then felt himself freeze.

Adams!

OF ALL the homes along the river, he would walk in on Adams!

Adams chuckled at him. "Destiny works against you, Ash."

Sutton moved forward, found a chair in the darkness and sat down. "You have a pleasant place," he said.

"A very pleasant place," said Adams. He tapped out his pipe and put it in his pocket. "So you died again."

"I was killed," said Sutton. "I got unkilled almost immediately."

"Some of my boys?" asked Adams. "They are hunting for you."

"A couple of strangers. Some of Morgan's gang."

Adams shook his head. "I don't know the name."

"He probably didn't tell you his name," said Shotton. "He told you I was coming back."

"So that was it. The man out of the future. You have him worried, Ash."

"I need a phone," said Sutton.

"You can use the phone."

"And I need an hour."

Adams shook his head. "I can't give you an hour."

"A half-hour, then. I may have a chance to make it. A half-hour after I finish my call."

"Nor a half-hour, either."

"You never gamble, do you?"

"Never," said Adams.

"I do," said Sutton. He rose. "Where is that phone? I'm going to gamble on you."

"Sit down, Ash," said Adams, almost kindly. "Sit down and tell me something."

Stubbornly, Sutton remained standing.

"If you could give me your word," said Adams, "that this destiny business won't harm Man, if you could tell me it won't give aid and comfort to our enemies . . ."

"Man hasn't any enemies," said Ash, "except the ones he's made."

"The galaxy is waiting for us to crack. Waiting to close in at the first sign of weakness."

"That's because we taught them it. They watched us use their own weaknesses to push them under."

"What will this destiny do?" asked Adams.

"It will teach Man humility," said Sutton. "Humility and responsibility."

"It's not a religion," said Adams. "That's what Raven told me. But it sounds like a religion . . . with all that preaching about humility."

"Dr. Raven was right," Sutton told him. "It's not a religion. Destiny and religions could flourish side by side and exist in perfect peace. They do not conflict. Rather, they would complement one another. Destiny stands for the same things most religions stand for, and it holds out no promise of an after-life. It leaves that to religion."

"Ash," asked Adams quietly, "you have read your history?"

Sutton nodded.

"Think back," said Adams. "Remember the Crusades. Remember the rise of Mohammedanism. Remember Cromwell in England. Remember Germany and America. And Russia and America. Religion and ideas, Ash. Man will fight for an idea when he wouldn't lift a hand for land or life or honor. But an idea to make other races fight Man . . . that's a different thing."

"And you're afraid of an idea."

"We can't afford any, Ash. Not right now, at least."

"And still," Sutton told him, "it has been the ideas that have made men grow. We wouldn't have a culture if it weren't for ideas."

"Right now," said Adams bitterly, "men are fighting in the future over this destiny of yours."

"That's why I have to use the phone," said Sutton. "That's why I need an hour."

ADAMS rose heavily to his feet. "I may be making a mistake," he said. "It's something I have never done in all my life. But I seem to be doing a lot of things I never did before. For once I'll gamble."

He led the way across the patio and into a dimly lighted room, filled with old-fashioned furniture of the 50th and 60th centuries.

"Jonathon," he called.

Feet pattered in the hall and the android came into the room.

"A pair of dice," said Adams heavily. "Mr. Sutton and I are about to gamble."

"Dice, sir?"

"Yes, that pair you and the cook are using."

"Yes, sir," said Jonathon.

He turned and disappeared and Sutton listened to his feet going through the house, fainter and fainter.

Adams turned to face him.

"One throw each," he said. "High man wins."

Sutton nodded, tense.

"If you win, you get the hour," said Adams. "If I win, you take my orders."

"I'll throw with you," said Sutton. "On terms like that, I'm willing to gamble."

And he was thinking: I lifted the battered ship on Cygni VII and maneuvered it through space. I was the engine and the pilot, the power tubes and navigator. Energy garnered by my body took the ship and lifted it and drove it through space . . . eleven years through space. I brought the ship down tonight through atmosphere with the engines dead so it could not be spotted and I landed in the river. I could pick a book out of that case and carry it to the table without laying hands on it, and I could turn the pages without the use of fingertips.

But dice.

They roll so fast and topple so.

"Win or lose," said Adams, "you can use the phone."

"If I lose," said Sutton, "I won't need the phone."

Jonathon came back and laid the dice upon a table top. When he saw that the two humans were waiting for him to go, he left. His footsteps died away.

Sutton nodded at the dice carelessly. "You first," he said.

Adams picked them up, held them in his fist and shook them. Their clicking was like the frightened porcelain chatter of teeth.

His fist came down above the table and his fingers opened. The little white cubes spun and whirled on the polished top. They came to rest.

One was a five, the other a six.

Adams raised his eyes to Sutton and there was nothing in them. No triumph. Absolutely nothing.

"Your turn," he said.

Perfect, thought Sutton, nothing less than perfect. It has to be two sixes.

HE STRETCHED out his hand and picked up the dice, shook them in his fist, felt the shape and size of them rolling in his palm.

Now take them in your mind, he told himself . . . take them in your mind as well as in your fist. Hold them in your mind, make them a part of you, as you made the two ships you drove through space, as you could make a book or chair or a flower you wished to pick.

He changed for a moment and his heart faltered to a stop. The blood slowed to a trickle in his arteries and veins, and he was not breathing. He felt the energy system take over, the other body that drew raw energy from anything that could be tapped.

His mind reached out and took the dice and shook them inside the prison of his fist. He brought his hand down with a swooping gesture and let his fingers uncurl. The dice came dancing out.

They were dancing in his brain, too, as well as on the table top and he saw them, or sensed them, or was aware of them, as if they were a part of him. Aware of the sides that had the six black dots and the sides with all the other numbers.

But they were slippery to handle, hard to make go the way he wanted them to go. For a fearful, agonizing second, it seemed almost as if the spinning cubes had minds and personalities that were their very own.

One of them was a six and the other still was rolling. The six was coming up and it toppled for a moment, threatening to fall back.

A push, thought Sutton. Just a little push. But with brain power instead of muscular.

The six came up and the two dice lay there, both of them showing sixes.

Sutton drew in a sobbing breath and his heart beat once again and the blood pumped through the veins.

The two men stood in silence for a moment, staring at one another across the table top.

Adams spoke and his voice was quiet; one could not have guessed from his tone what he felt.

"The phone is over there," he said.

Sutton bowed, ever so slightly, and felt foolish doing it, like a character out of some incredibly old and bad piece of romantic fiction.

"Destiny," he said, "still is working for me. When it comes to the pinch, destiny is there."

"Your hour will start," said Adams, "as soon as you finish phoning."

He turned smartly and walked back to the patio, very stiff and straight.

Now that he had won, Sutton suddenly was weak, and he walked unsteadily to the phone. He sat down before it and took out the directory that he needed.

INFormation. And the subheading: Geography, historic, North America.

HE FOUND the number and dialed it and the screen lit up.

The information robot said: "Can I be of service, sir?"

"Yes," said Sutton. "I would like to know where Wisconsin was."

"Where are you now, sir?"

"I am at the residence of Mr. Christopher Adams."

"The Mr. Adams who is with the Department of Galactic Investigation?"

"The same."

"Then," the robot said, "you are in Wisconsin."

"Bridgeport?" asked Sutton.

"It was on the Wisconsin River, on the north bank, a matter of seven miles above the junction with the Mississippi."

"But those rivers—I've never heard of them."

"You are near them now, sir. The Wisconsin flows into the Mississippi just below the point where you are now."

Sutton hung up, rose shakily and

crossed the room, went out on the patio.

Adams was lighting up his pipe. "You got what you wanted?"

Sutton nodded.

"Get going, then," said Adams. "Your hour's already started."

Sutton hesitated.

"What is it, Ash?"

"I wonder," said Sutton, "I wonder if you would shake my hand."

"Why, sure," said Adams.

He rose ponderously to his feet and held out his hand.

"I don't know which," said Adams, "but you are either the greatest man or the biggest damn fool that I have ever known."

XXXI

BRIDGEPORT dreamed in its rock-hemmed niche alongside the swiftly flowing river. The summer sun beat down into the pocket between the tree-mantled cliffs with a fierceness that seemed to squeeze the last hope of life and energy out of everything . . . out of the weather-beaten houses, out of the dust that lay along the street, out of leaf-wilted shrub and bush and beaten rows of flowers.

The railroad tracks curved around a bluff and entered the town, then curved around another bluff and were gone again. For the short span of this arc out of somewhere into nowhere, they shone in the sun with the burnished sharpness of a whetted knife. Between the tracks and river, the railroad station drowsed, a foursquare building that had the look of having hunched its shoulders against summer sun and winter cold for so many years that it stood despondent and cringing, waiting for the next whiplash of weather.

Sutton stood on the station platform and listened to the river, the suck and swish of tiny whirlpools that ran along the shore, the gurgle of water flowing across a hidden, upward-canted log, the soft sigh of watery fingers grasping at the tip of a downward-drooping branch. And above it all, cutting through it all, the real noise of the river.

He lifted his head and squinted against the sun to follow the mighty metal span that leaped across the river from the bluff-top, slanting down toward the high-graded roadbed that walked across the gently rising valley on the other shore.

Man leaped rivers on great spans of steel and he never heard the talk of rivers as they rolled down to the sea. Man leaped seas on wings powered by smooth, sleek engines, and the thunder of the sea was a sound lost in the empty vault of sky. Man crossed space in metallic cylinders that twisted time and space and hurled Man and his miraculous machines down alleys of conjectural mathematics that were not even dreamed of in this world of Bridgeport, 1977.

Man was in a hurry and he went too far, too fast. So far and fast that

he missed many things . . . things that he should have taken time to learn as he went along . . . things that someday in some future age he would take the time to study. Someday Man would come back along the trail again and learn the things he'd missed and wonder why he missed them and think upon the years that were lost for never knowing them.

Sutton stepped down from the platform and found a faint footpath that went down to the river. Carefully, he made his way along it, for it was soft and crumbly and there were stones that might turn underfoot.

AT THE end of the footpath he found the old man.

The oldster sat perched on a small boulder planted in the mud and he held a cane pole slanted riverwise across his knees. An ancient pipe protruded from a two-weeks' growth of graying whiskers, and an earthenware jug with a corncob for a cork sat beside him, easy to his hand.

Sutton sat down cautiously on the shelving shore beside the boulder and wondered at the coolness of the shade from the trees and undergrowth—a welcome coolness after the fierce splash of sun upon the village just a few rods up the bank.

"Catching anything?" he asked.

"Nope," said the old man.

He puffed away at his pipe and Sutton watched in fascinated silence. One would have sworn, he told himself, that the mop of whiskers was on fire.

"Didn't catch nothing yesterday, either," the old man added. He took his pipe out of his mouth with a deliberate, considered motion and spat neatly into the center of a river eddy. "Didn't catch nothing the day before yesterday."

"You want to catch something, don't you?" Sutton asked.

"Nope." The old man put down a hand and lifted the jug, worked out the corncob cork and wiped the jug's neck carefully with a dirty hand. "Have a snort," he invited.

Sutton, remembering the dirty hand, took it, gagging to himself. Cautiously, he lifted it and tipped it to his mouth.

The stuff splashed and gurgled down his throat and it was liquid fire laced with gall and with a touch of brimstone to give it something extra.

Sutton snatched the jug away and held it by the handle, keeping his mouth wide open to cool it and air out the taste.

The old man took the jug back and Sutton swabbed at the tears running down his cheeks.

"Ain't aged the way she should be," the old man apologized. "But I ain't got the time to fool around with that."

He took himself a hooker, wiped his mouth with the back of his hand and whooshed out his breath in gusty satisfaction. He put the jug down again and worked the cork in tight.

"Stranger, ain't you?" he asked Sutton. "Don't recall seeing you around."

SUTTON nodded. "Looking for some people by the name of Sutton. John H. Sutton."

The old man chuckled. "Old John, eh? Him and me was kids together. Sneakiest little rascal that I ever knew. Ain't worth a tinker's damn, old John ain't. Went off to law school and got him an education. But he didn't make a go of it. Roosting out on a farm up on the ridge, over there across the river." He shot a look at Sutton. "You ain't no relative of his, are you?"

"Well," said Sutton, "not exactly. Not very close, at least."

"Tomorrow's the Fourth," said the old man, "and I recollect the time that John and me blew up a culvert in Campbell Hollow, come the Fourth. Found some dynamite a road gang had been using for blasting. John and me, we figured it would make a bigger bang if we confined it, sort of. So we put her in the culvert pipe and lit a long fuse. Mister, it blew that culvert all to hell. I recollect our dads like to took the hide off us for doing it."

Dead ringer, thought Sutton. John H. Sutton is just across the river and tomorrow is the Fourth. July 4, 1977, that's what the letter said.

And I didn't have to ask. The old codger unwittingly told me.

The sun was a furnace blast from the river's surface, but here, underneath the trees, one just caught the edge of the flare of heat. A leaf floated by and there was a grasshopper riding on it. The grasshopper

tried to jump ashore, but his jump fell short and the current grabbed and swallowed him out of sight.

"Never had a chance," said the old man, "that hopper didn't. Wickedest river in these United States, the old Wisconsin is. Can't trust her. Tried to run steamboats on her in the early days, but they couldn't do it, for where there was a channel one day there'd be a sand bar on the next. Current shifts the sand something awful. Government fellow wrote a report on her once. Said the only way you could use the Wisconsin for navigation was to lathe and plaster it."

From far overhead came the rumble of traffic crossing the bridge. A train came by, chuffing and grinding, a long freight that dragged itself up the valley. Long after it had passed, Sutton heard its whistle hooting.

"Destiny," said the old man, "sure wasn't working worth a hoot for that hopper, was it?"

SUTTON sat upright. "What was that you said?"

"Don't mind me," the old man told him. "I go around mumbling to myself. Sometimes people hear me; mostly they don't."

"But destiny—you said something about destiny."

"Interested in it, lad? Wrote a story about it once. Didn't amount to much. Used to mess around some, writing, in my early days."

Sutton relaxed and lay back.

A dragonfly skimmed the water's surface. Far up the bank, a small fish jumped and left a widening circle in the water.

"About this fishing," said Sutton. "You don't seem to care whether you catch anything or not."

"Rather not," the old man told him. "Catch something and you got to take it off the hook. Then you got to bait up again and throw the hook back in the river. Then you got to clean the fish. It's an awful sight of work." He took the pipe out of his mouth and spat carefully into the river. "Ever read Thoreau, son?"

Sutton shook his head, trying to remember. The name struck a chord of memory. There had been a fragment in a book of ancient literature in his college days. All that was left of what was believed to have been an extensive amount of writing.

"You ought to," the old man told him. "He had the right idea."

Sutton rose and dusted off his trousers.

"Stick around," the old man said. "You ain't bothering me. Hardly none at all."

"Got to be getting along," said Sutton.

"Hunt me up some other time," the old man said. "We could talk some more."

"Someday," Sutton answered politely, "I'll do just that."

"Care for another snort before you go?"

"No, thank you," said Sutton, backing off. "No, thank you very much."

"Oh, well," the old man said. He

lifted the jug and took a long and gurgling drink.

Sutton climbed the bank to the blaze of sun again.

"Sure," said the station agent in the village, "the Suttons live just across the river, over in Grant County. Several ways to get there. Which one would you like?"

"The longest one," Sutton told him. "I'm not in any hurry."

The moon was coming up when Sutton climbed the hill to reach the bridge.

He was in no hurry. He had all night. Tomorrow was the Fourth.

XXXII

THE land was wild . . . wilder than anything Sutton had ever seen on the seeded, trimmed and watered parks of his native Earth. The land tilted upward, as if it rested on a knife edge, and it was littered by great clumps of stone which appeared to have been flung down in godlike anger by a giant hand out of forgotten time. Stark bluffs speared erect, soaring massively, masked by mighty trees that seemed to have tried, at one time, to have matched the height and dignity of the rocky cliffs. Through the trees, Asher Sutton glimpsed the break in the cliffs ahead and knew that he was at the place that old John Sutton had mentioned in his letter.

The sun was only a couple of hours high and there still was time. There still would be time, for John Sutton had talked to the man only a couple of hours or so and then had gone to dinner.

From there on, with the cleft of the cliff in sight, Sutton took his time. He reached the top and found the boulder that his old ancestor had spoken of. It was almost designed for sitting.

He sat upon it and stared across the valley, grateful for the shade.

And there was peace, as John Sutton had said there was. Peace and the quieting majesty of the scene before him . . . the strange third-dimensional quality of the space that hung, as if alive, above the river valley. Strangeness, too, the strangeness of expected . . . and unexpected . . . happenings.

He looked at his watch. It was half-past nine, so he left the boulder and lay down behind a patch of brush and waited. Almost as he did, there was a soft, smooth swish of motor-noise and a ship came down, a tiny one-man ship, slanting across the trees, to land in the pasture just beyond the fence.

A man got out and leaned against the ship, staring at the sky and trees, as if satisfying himself that he had reached his destination.

Sutton chuckled quietly to himself.

Stage setting, he said. Dropping in unexpectedly and with a crippled ship . . . no need to explain your presence. Waiting for a man to come walking up and talk to you. Most natural thing in all the worlds. You didn't seek him out; he saw you and came to you, and of course he talked.

You couldn't come walking up the

road and turn in at the gate and knock at the door and say: "I came to pick up all the scandal I can about the Sutton family. I wonder if I might sit down and talk with you."

But you could land in a pasture with a crippled ship and first you'd talk of corn and pasture, of weather and of grass, and finally you'd get around to talking about personal and family matters.

The man had his wrench out and was tinkering at the ship.

It must almost be time.

Sutton lifted himself on his arms and stared through the close-laced branches of the hazel brush.

John H. Sutton was coming down the hill, a big-bellied man with a trim white beard and an old black hat, and his walk was a waddle with some swagger still left in it.

XXXIII

SO THIS is failure, Eva Armour said. This is how failure feels. Dry in the throat and heavy in the heart and tired in the brain.

I am bitter, she told herself, and I have a right to be. Although I am so tired with trying and with failure that the knife edge of bitterness is dulled.

"The psych tracer in Adams' office has stopped," Herkimer had said, and then the plate had gone dead as he cut the visor.

There was no trace of Sutton. The tracer had stopped.

That meant that Sutton was dead. He could not be dead, for historically he had written a book and he had not yet written it.

But history was something that you couldn't trust. It was put together wrong, or copied wrong, or misinterpreted, or improved upon by a man with a misplaced imagination. Truth was so hard to keep, myth and fable so easy to breathe into a life that was more acceptable than truth.

Half the history of Sutton, Eva knew, must be sheer legend. And yet there were certain truths that must be truths indeed.

Someone had written a book and it would have had to be Sutton. No one else could break the language in which his notes were written, and the words themselves breathed the very sincerity of the man himself.

Sutton had died, but not on Earth nor in Earth's solar system and not a youth of sixty. He had died on a planet circling some far star and he had not died for many, many years.

These were truths that could not well be twisted. These were truths that had to stand until they were disproved.

And yet the tracer had stopped.

Eva got up from her chair and walked across the room to the window that looked out on the landscaped grounds of the Orion Arms. Fireflies were dotting the bushes with their brief, cold flame and the late moon was coming up behind a cloud that looked like a gentle hill.

So much work, she thought. So many years of planning. Androids

who had worn no mark upon their forehead and who had been formed to look exactly like the humans they replaced. And other androids who had marks upon their foreheads, but who had not been the androids made in the laboratories of the eightieth century. Elaborate networks of espionage, waiting for the day Sutton would come home. Years of puzzling over the records of the past, trying to separate the truth from the half-truth and the downright error.

Years of watching and of waiting, parrying the counter-espionage of the Revisionists, laying the groundwork for the day of action. And being careful . . . always careful. For the eightieth century must not know, must not even guess.

But there had been unseen factors.

MORGAN had come back and warned Adams that Sutton must be killed.

Two humans had been planted on Benton's forfeited asteroid.

Although those two factors could not account entirely for what had happened. There was another factor somewhere.

She stood at the window, looking out at the rising moon, and her brows knit into crinkling lines of thought. But she was too tired. No thought would come.

Except defeat.

Defeat would explain it all.

Sutton might be dead and that would be defeat, utter and complete. Victory for an officialdom that was at

once too timid and too vicious to take any active part in the struggle for the book. An officialdom that sought to keep the status quo, willing to wipe out centuries of thought to maintain its grip on the galaxy.

Such a defeat, she knew, would be even worse than a defeat by the Revisionists. If the Revisionists won, there still would be a book; there still would be the teaching of Man's own destiny. And that, she told herself, was better than no inkling of destiny at all.

Behind her, the visiphone purred, and she spun around, hurried across the room.

A robot said: "Mr. Sutton called. He asked about Wisconsin."

"Wisconsin?"

"It's an old place name," the robot explained. "He asked about a place called Bridgeport, Wisconsin."

"As if he were going there?"

"It would appear so."

"Quick," said Eva. "Where is this Bridgeport?"

"Five or six miles away," said the robot, "and at least four thousand years."

She caught her breath. "In time," she said.

"Yes, miss, in time."

"Tell me exactly," Eva told him.

The robot shook his head. "I don't know. I couldn't catch it. His mind was all roiled up. He'd just come through a trying experience."

"Then you can't help."

"I wouldn't bother if I were you," the robot told her. "He struck me as a man who knew what he was doing. He'll come out all right."

"You're sure of that?"

"I would like to be," the robot admitted reluctantly.

XXXIV

A DRY stick cracked under Sutton's feet and the man with the wrench slowly turned around. A swift, smooth smile spread upon his face in widening crinkles to hide the amazement that glittered in his eyes.

"Good afternoon," said Sutton.

John H. Sutton was a stout speck that had almost climbed the hill. The sun had passed its zenith and was swinging toward the west. Down in the river valley, a half-dozen crows were cawing; it was as if the sound came from underneath their feet.

The man held out his hand. "Mr. Sutton, isn't it?" he asked. "The Mr. Sutton of the eightieth century?"

"Drop the wrench," said Sutton.

The man pretended not to hear him. "My name is Dean," he said. "Arnold Dean. I'm from the eighty-fourth."

"Drop the wrench," said Sutton.

Dean dropped it. Sutton hooked it along the ground with a toe until it was out of reach.

"That is better," he said. "Now, let's sit down and talk."

Dean gestured with a thumb. "The old man will be coming back. He will get to wondering and he will come back. He had a lot of questions he forgot to ask."

"Not for a while," Sutton told him. "Not until he's eaten and had an after-dinner nap."

Dean grunted and eased himself to a sitting position, his back against the ship. "Random factors," he said. "That's what balls up the detail. You're a random factor, Sutton. It wasn't planned this way."

Sutton sat down easily and picked up the wrench. He weighed it in his hand. Blood, he thought, looking at the wrench. You'll have blood upon one end before the day is out.

"Tell me," said Dean. "Now that you are here, what do you plan to do?"

"Easy," said Sutton. "You're going to talk to me. You're going to tell me something that I need to know."

"Gladly," Dean agreed.

"You said you came from the eighty-fourth. What year?"

"Eighty-three eighty-six," said Dean. "But if I were you, I'd go a little past that. You'd find more to interest you."

"But you figure I'll never get even as far as that," said Sutton. "You think that you will win."

"Of course I do," said Dean.

Sutton dug into the ground with the wrench. "A while ago, I found a man who died very shortly after. He recognized me and he made a sign with his fingers."

Dean spat upon the ground. "Android. They worship you, Sutton. They made a religion out of you. Because, you see, you gave them hope to cling to. You gave them something that made them, in one way, the equal of Man."

"I take it," Sutton said, "you don't believe a thing I wrote."

"Should I?"

"I do," said Sutton.

DEAN said nothing.

"You have taken the thing I wrote," said Sutton evenly, "and you are trying to use it to fashion one more rung in the ladder of Man's vanity. You have missed the point entirely. You have no sense of destiny because you gave destiny no chance whatever."

And he felt foolish even as he said it, for it sounded so much like preaching. So much like what the men of old had said of faith when faith was just a word, before it had become a force to really reckon with.

"I won't lecture you," he said, angry at the smooth way Dean had put him on the defensive. "I won't preach at you. You either accept destiny or you ignore it. So far as I'm concerned I'll not raise a hand to convince any single man. The book I wrote tells you what I know. You can take it or you can leave it . . . it's all the same to me."

"Sutton," said Dean, "you're batting your head against a stone wall. You haven't got a chance. You're fighting humankind. The whole human race against you . . . and nothing's ever stood against the human race. All you have is a pack of measly androids and a few renegade humans . . . the kind of humans that

used to swarm to the old cult-worships."

"The empire is built on androids and robots," Sutton told him. "They can throw you out any time they want to. Without them you couldn't hold a single foot of ground outside the solar system."

"They will stick with us in the empire," Dean retorted, very confident. "They may fight us on this business of destiny, but they'll stay with us because they can't get along without us. They can't reproduce, you know. And they can't make themselves. They have to have humans to keep their race going, to replace the ones who get knocked off."

He chuckled. "Until one android can create another android, they will stick with us and they will work with us. If they didn't, they would be committing racial suicide."

"What I can't understand," said Sutton, "is how you know which ones are fighting you and which are sticking with you."

"That," said Dean, "is the hell of it . . . we don't. If we did, we'd make short work of this lousy war. The android who fought you yesterday may shine your shoes tomorrow, and how are you to know? The answer is, you don't."

HE PICKED up a tiny stone and flicked it out on the pasture grass.

"Sutton," he said, "it's enough to drive you nuts. No battles, really. Just guerrilla skirmishes here and there, when one small task force sent out to do a time-fixing job is ambushed by another task force sent out by the other side to intercept them."

"Like I intercepted you," said Sutton.

"Huh . . ." said Dean, and then he brightened. "Why, sure. Like you intercepted me."

One moment Dean was sitting with his back against the machine, talking as if he meant to keep on talking . . . and in the next moment his body was a fluid streak of motion, jackknifing up and forward in a lunge toward the wrench that Sutton held.

Sutton moved instinctively, toes tightening against the ground, leg muscles flexing to drive his body aside, hand starting to jerk the wrench away.

But Dean had the advantage of a full second's start.

Sutton felt the wrench ripped from his grip, saw the flash of it in the sun as Dean swung it sharply for the blow.

Dean's lips were moving. Even as he tried to throw up his arms to shield his head, Sutton read the words the other's lips were ironically forming:

"So you thought the blood on the wrench would be mine!"

Then pain exploded inside Sutton's head and he fell through darkness.

—CLIFFORD D. SIMAK

CONCLUDED NEXT MONTH